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# (Un)papering the cracks in South Africa

The role of 'traditional' and 'new' media in  
nation-negotiation around Julius Malema on the  
eve of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™

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## Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_09.09.2011\_\_\_\_\_

# ABSTRACT

In April 2010, amidst the nation-unifying discourses prevalent during the preparation for the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™ to be hosted in South Africa, a series of events gave rise to the revitalization of other discourses in the national media: those of racial polarization and the possibility of a race war. The public singing of the “Shoot the *Boer*” struggle song by ANCYL leader Julius Malema and the subsequent murder of AWB leader Eugene Terre’Blanche, two events which were being attributed a causal link in national media, was one of the main reasons for the revitalization of these discourses.

In this study I have explored some of the ways in which, in the month of April, on the eve of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™, Julius Malema’s statements and actions, widely disseminated on national media and framed as controversial, incited South Africans to voice, discuss and negotiate issues of the ‘new’ ‘post-Apartheid’ South Africa in 2010.

In order to explore the nature of such opinions and discussions I drew on data from three main sources: news reports and opinion articles from the South African daily newspaper, the *Cape Times*; interviews with South African students from the University of Cape Town; and, from discussions taking place among South Africans online on Facebook, indiscussion groups created to discuss the then current Malema topic. By using the approach of crossing between online and offline fields and interaction, alongside a triangulation approach between the three sources, I aimed to devise a methodology that did not dichotomize online and offline social interaction, nor completely separated ‘traditional’ media – printed press, radio, and television - from ‘new’ media – mobile phones and the Internet in particular.

Drawing on both James Halloran’s theory of *effectiveness* (1964) to explain popular understandings around media as being able to immediately, directly, and *effectively* influence people, and Stanley Cohen’s concepts of moral panics and folk devils (1972), to explain the revitalization of such understandings of *effectiveness* in times of crisis, provided this study a useful framework with which to analyse the context lived in April 2010 in South Africa.

Some of the themes I identified in such opinions, discussions, and interviews, selected based on their recurrence, demonstrated the resilient tendency to attribute to Julius Malema, through the media, the ability to immediately, directly, and *effectively* galvanize South Africans: into a Race War; into turning South Africa into another Zimbabwe or Zimbabwe II; and, into leaving the country. However, simultaneously, opinions and discussions showed a complex interaction of perceptions of *effectiveness* with a negotiation around other “mediating factors and influences” in South African society in the year 2010. These included an awareness of the media’s drive to sell news, of the ineffectual nature of country’s leadership, of the disenchantment with the possibility of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ in face of the country’s stark socio-economic and political inequality, an inequality still visible along racial lines.

These themes led me to conclude that in April 2010, incited to a large extent by the media’s spotlight on Julius Malema, an item of high news value at the time, South Africans were negotiating the cracks of South African society lived in the year 2010. This process included a papering over the cracks with discourses of *effectiveness* and, simultaneously, an ‘unpapering’ or revealing of those cracks by exploring the other mediating factors and influences at work in the context.

In addition, since I have found part of the data for this study online, I argue that the Internet, although an unconventional field-site for Social Anthropology, given its non-physical and trans-local nature, holds possibilities for complementing and enriching certain studies in Social Anthropology, in what is an increasingly interconnected and fast-paced 21<sup>st</sup> century. In turn, the Internet is a research area that could benefit significantly from anthropological insights in the process of understanding the complex and nuanced effects of the introduction, adoption, and immersion of this emerging media technology in the everyday lives of people in different contexts and in a rapidly changing world. These insights could shed light on studies *in*, *on* and *using* the Internet even in developing countries such as South Africa, and in the rest of Africa, where Internet access although still low and unequal, is quickly rising.

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# ACRONYMS

African National Congress	ANC
African National Congress Youth League	ANCYL
Afrikaner Resistance Movement	AWB
Anthropology Southern Africa	ASnA
Committee to Protect Journalists	CPJ
Democratic Alliance	DA
Entertainment Sports Programming Network	ESPN
Green Skin Initiative	GSI
Information Communication Technology	ICT
Information and Communication Technology for Development	ICT4D
Millennium Development Goals	MDGs
National Party	NP
South African Broadcasting Corporation	SABC
Student Representative Council	SRC
Truth and Reconciliation Commission	TRC
University of Cape Town	UCT
Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front	ZANU-PF

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# INTRODUCTION

## AN IMMINENT “RACE WAR” ON THE EVE OF A NATION-UNIFYING SPORTS MEGA-EVENT

2010 was definitely a year of excitement in South Africa; and one of paradoxes. With the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™ at the centre of most of the media’s attention, before the event took place, news, opinions and discussions mostly oscillated between the typical *either or* scenario: an imminent success or a disaster?

Very close to the kick-off of the mega-event, some extra agitation emerged in the South African media, in this case originating from another state of affairs in the country. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2010, Julius Sello Malema, the leader of South Africa’s ruling party youth league - the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League (ANCYL) - sang the song *Ayesab’ Amagwala* during his public birthday speech in Polokwane. The Zulu song, a popular song sung by many South Africans during the liberation struggle against Apartheid throughout the 1980s and 1990s, contains the words “*dubul’ibhunu*” which translate into English as “Shoot the *boer*” (Afriforum & TAU SA v Malema & ANC, 2010; Archival Platform, 2011). *Boer*, which literally means ‘farmer’ in Dutch, is a term used to refer to white South Africans from Dutch, German or Huguenot descent who speak Afrikaans, and are also known as Afrikaners (Afriforum & TAU SA v Malema & ANC, 2010: 4; *Boer*, 2011). Malema sang the song again on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March at a students’ gathering at the University of Johannesburg. There was an immediate uproar in the media and in wider society (Archival Platform, 2011). A debate emerged as politicians and citizens discussed whether the song should be allowed as part of South Africa’s heritage and history, or prohibited as hate-speech: heritage, given the importance it had once had in the history of the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa; hate-speech, for possibly instigating feelings of hate and actions of violence against white South Africans, and contributing to racial polarization in post-Apartheid South Africa (Afriforum & TAU SA v Malema & ANC, 2010; Archival Platform, 2011).

On the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2010, there was an occurrence which added ‘fuel to the fire’: Eugene Terre’Blanche was found dead on his farm just outside the small town of Ventersdorp. He was the founder and leader of the *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (AWB -



Afrikaner Resistance Movement), an organization formed in 1973 by right-wing extremist Afrikaners to resist what they saw as the weakening of Apartheid regulations at the time (*Cape Times*, April 6 2010). According to the news, he had been murdered by two of his black employees during a dispute that had originated from wages that Terre'Blanche had repeatedly not paid them (*Cape Times*, April 6 2010). South African President, Jacob Zuma, together with other government officials, and politically and morally influential individuals, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, tried to defuse tensions, as theories linking Malema's singing of the "Shoot the *Boer*" song and Terre'Blanche's murder proliferated throughout the country (*Cape Times*, April 6 2010; Archival Platform, 2011). However, old-guard groups which had for long been quiescent, such as the AWB and the *Suidlanders*, another right-wing extremist organization that, like the AWB, advocated white supremacy in association with Christian beliefs, were marching in Ventersdorp in protest against the latest events, and threatening to avenge the murder (*Cape Times*, April 6 & 7 2010; 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, 2010a). (

But the series of events did not end there. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, during the recording of a popular current affairs show called *Africa 360*, broadcast by South Africa's independent television channel, e.tv, what started off within the usual programming parameters soon degenerated into an unexpected dispute (*Cape Times*, April 8 2010). The participants of the day were the AWB's secretary-general, Andre Visagie, political analyst Lebohang Pheko, and the show's usual host and mediator, Chris Maroleng. The topic of the debate was the killing of farmers, which had been occurring around the country for some time<sup>1</sup>. Obviously, as the debate got going, the preceding weekend's event – the murder and its alleged link to the song - became the centre of attention and the discussion turned into a heated argument. In the course of the argument things took a more dramatic turn when Visagie abruptly got up from his seat, threw aside his microphone and, as he was making his way to the studio exit, turned back to Pheko and, pointing his finger at her, said: "You won't dare interrupt me once more". At this point, Maroleng had put himself between the two guests in an attempt to bring the dispute to a close, but Visagie called on his bodyguard, who had accompanied him into the recording room, to remove the show's presenter. As Visagie's bodyguard obediently approached the scene, Maroleng firmly warned "Touch me *on* my studio and

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<sup>1</sup> According to Genocide Watch (2002: 1), approximately two thousand farmers have been murdered in South Africa since 1994, most of whom were white Afrikaners, since they constitute the majority of the

you'll be in trouble [sic]", to which Visagie replied in a threatening tone "I'll touch you *on* your studio [sic]" - a verbal interaction that, once the quarrel was aired on the news, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, became instantly famous, countrywide and internationally, thanks to both 'traditional' mass media – the printed press, the radio and television - and 'new' mass media – mobile phones and the Internet. The 'slip of the tongue' gave rise to a large collection of songs, jokes, and memorabilia, referencing the two (Huisman, 2010).

Less than 24 hours later, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, Malema 're-entered' the media spotlight at a press conference on his most recent visit to Zimbabwe, during which the ANCYL leader had publicly supported President Mugabe's nationalization program and, once again, had sung the "Shoot the *Boer*" song (*Cape Times*, April 9 2010). This despite the fact that during the month of March a number of initiatives had been taken by various groups to register protest against the song (Archival Platform, 2011): a hate speech complaint had been filed by AFRIFORUM and TAU SA with the Equality Court against Malema, right after the singing of "Shoot the *Boer*" that took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March at the University of Johannesburg; on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, a "Prosecute Malema" online campaign was launched to gather signatures for a letter directed to President Zuma; by the 25<sup>th</sup> of March the South African Human Rights Commission had received 109 complaints against Malema for singing the song (Mbanjwa, 2010); and on March 26<sup>th</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup>, the song had been ruled unlawful and unconstitutional by the North and South Gauteng High Courts, respectively. The April 8<sup>th</sup> press conference with Malema was held at the ANC's headquarters, the famous Luthuli House, where many deliberations had been conducted during the struggle against Apartheid. While Malema was criticizing the Zimbabwean political opposition for fighting for legitimacy in exile, "from the air-conditioned offices of Sandton<sup>2</sup>", Jonah Fisher, a British BBC journalist, interrupted him with the question: "But you live in Sandton. So they're not welcome in Sandton, but you are?" Malema reacted to this question by saying: "This is a building of a revolutionary party and you know nothing about the revolution. Here you behave or else you jump", to which Fisher replied, "This is becoming a joke [...] that's rubbish". Malema immediately asked security to remove the journalist and added, "Don't come here with that white tendency [...]. If you have got a tendency of undermining blacks

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<sup>2</sup> One of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in Johannesburg (and in South Africa), where Malema also resides.

even where you work, you are in the wrong place. Go out! You bloody agent! [...]". Fisher left before being forced to leave by security (*Cape Times*, April 9 2010).

April 2010 was anything but a dull month for politics in South Africa, and hence for South African media. Headlines and discussions, on and in the various media, speculating on a looming Race War<sup>3</sup> were widespread.

Concurrently, in what seemed like a parallel Universe, "Different tribes, one Nation" (Castle), "Unite *Mzansi*<sup>4</sup> unite" (Adidas), "One game changes everything" (ESPN), were some of the slogans trumpeted in adverts and campaigns in the country on the eve of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™. Drawing from the experience of hosting the Rugby World Cup in 1995, remembered as a moment in post-Apartheid South Africa where all South Africans came together as a nation, the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™ was seen as a renewed opportunity to promote national pride and unity. It was also viewed as an opportunity for fulfilling more tangible economic and developmental goals such as the improvement of infrastructures, the creation of jobs, and the international showcasing of South Africa's, and Africa's, ability to successfully host a 'world-class' event, to cite a few benefits expected to flow from the event (Black, 2007; Kersting, 2007; Cornelissen & Swart, 2010; Herman, 2011).

South Africa in April 2010 was crowded with contentious, contending, contradictory and complementary discourses, discourses which were widely and comprehensively broadcast across both 'traditional' and 'new' mass media in the country. It was from within this particular context, one which I experienced when I was residing in South Africa in the month of April 2010 that my research interest and question emerged:

Amidst the nation-unifying discourses in preparation for the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™ alongside discourses of hate speech, racial polarization and a possible Race War, widespread in the media, how were South Africans discussing and negotiating these discourses?

More specifically, for the purposes of my thesis and research, in order to explore the nature of such discussions I decided to look at news and opinion pieces from a South African daily newspaper, the *Cape Times*, to interview South African students studying at the

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<sup>3</sup> I will use the term Race War in capital letters throughout this thesis because it was a main theme that emerged in the opinions and discussions I analysed.

<sup>4</sup> The Zulu and Xhosa word for 'South', used widely in the country to denote 'South Africa'.

University of Cape Town (UCT), and to delve into online conversations taking place on the increasingly popular social networking website, Facebook. By drawing data from the three sources I hope to have attained the following research objectives:

- Explore the opinions and the discussions that the series of events in April 2010 gave rise to among South Africans and to analyse some of the recurring themes in these opinions and discussions, alongside the themes pervasive in 'traditional' media.
- Investigate in a 'field-site' to date deemed less conventional in the discipline of Social Anthropology, such as that of the internet, given the non-physicality and trans-locality of its social spaces and interactions. In spite of this, it is my contention that taking investigation into such a vast field is potentially a valuable complementary addition to social research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where the internet is becoming increasingly part of the everyday lives of people. Including the everyday lives of South Africans, however, not overlooking media access inequalities, globally and nationally.
- Modestly add to an important growing body of work by Social Anthropologists *on*, *in* and using the Internet. The Internet being a research area that has received a lot more contributions informed by perspectives of information communication technology (ICT) scientists, engineers, economists, and even psychologists and sociologists, than it has from anthropologists.

This was not to be an ethnographic account of how users use or make sense of the Internet, nor how I myself have made use and made sense of the Internet as an ethnographic tool, but how I, *in* the Internet, was able to gather from South African users how they have generated meaning around the issues that Julius Malema was raising, in particular in the month of April, against a background of discrepancies: excitement around the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™ yet pervasive inequality and dissatisfaction throughout society. The account was to show how such data has in significant ways supplemented data I have gathered through more conventional offline methods and in 'traditional' media, supporting the resonance of discourses across 'traditional' and 'new' media, and across online and offline social spaces and interaction. Only after observing some of the themes that were emerging in online discussions among South Africans during the month of April 2010, that resonated with 'traditional' media and offline themes, did I suggest one use of the Internet, specifically social media, among South African Internet-users – that of nation-

negotiation. Nation-negotiation as in South African Internet-users voicing, exchanging and discussing, agreeing and challenging, opinions, experiences, attitudes and values, through participating in social media, such as the case of Facebook.

In Chapter 1, I demonstrate how media technologies have been met with high hopes and anxieties – ‘hypes’ - across time and societies, based on understandings that deem them to be able to immediately, directly, and effectively influence and transform the lives of people. These hypes are especially intense at the time of the infancy of these technologies, and in some contexts, in times of crisis. Drawing on James Halloran’s theory of *effectiveness* (1964) to explain popular understandings around media, and Stanley Cohen’s concepts of moral panics and folk devils (1972), to explain the revitalization of such understandings in times of crisis, provided this study a useful framework to analyse the context lived in April 2010 in South Africa. A context where direct causal links between Malema singing the “Shoot the *Boer*” song, and the murder of Terre’Blanche were being widely broadcast across media, giving rise to resonating opinions and discussions among the South Africans that contributed to this thesis – UCT students, *Cape Times* opinion-writers and Facebook-users. In addition, as one of the important social ‘public space’ for the ‘voicing’ of such opinions and discussions in this thesis, I also look into the hype around the Internet world-wide, in particular around social media, as one of the most recent emerging media technologies.

In Chapter 2, I draw mainly on the works of Daniel Miller (2010, 2011) and Christine Hine (2000) on ethnographic research *on, in, and using* the Internet and on the importance of treating online and offline social interaction as two complementary sides of everyday reality, to put forward the usefulness of the Internet in complementing conventional social research. I also draw on Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson’s (1997) critical analysis of archetypal understandings of concepts such as ‘field’ and ‘fieldwork’ in Social Anthropology to shed some light on why, in comparison to other disciplines, the potential of the Internet as a field-*site* might have remained underrated for social anthropologists. In addition, the Internet is a research area that should benefit significantly from social anthropological insights in the process of understanding the complex and nuanced effects of the introduction and adoption of this emerging media technology in the everyday lives of people in different contexts. One such context is South Africa, and other African countries, in which, although media access inequality is a reality, within countries and compared to developed countries, popularity and use of the medium is rapidly increasing.

In Chapter 3 I describe my methodological process, crossing across online and offline research to ensure the triangulation between the three sources of my data – the news and opinion pieces from *Cape Times*, the offline interviews (most of them) with the UCT students, and the discussions taking place on Facebook, regarding the series of events in the month of April 2011. I describe also my explorations in the unconventional field-site of the Internet with “refashioned” (Hine, 2000: 43) or “bricoleured” methods (Denzin, 2004), and discuss some of the ethical issues I encountered during such explorations.

In Chapter 4 I begin with a more detailed analysis of the discourses in ‘traditional media’ around Julius Malema, and the events that took place in April 2010, in light of media theories of news value, framing, and agenda-setting as well as theories of media *effectiveness* (Halloran, 1964) and moral panics (Cohen, 1972). Finally I proceed to the core ethnographic material of this thesis: some of the themes I encountered in an amalgamation of opinions and discussions among South Africans from UCT, *The Cape Times*, and Facebook, which resonate, in some instances, with Halloran’s (1964) and Cohen’s (1972) theories.

Before I begin, I shall clarify certain choices with regards to terminology that I will be using throughout the present thesis.

What today is referred to as ‘traditional media’ when talking about older ICTs, such as the printed press, radio, and television, had all once been called ‘new’ media (Katz & Aspden, 1997). These media can be seen to have in their different ways changed the way people spend their time as well as the ways in which they communicate and interact with each other in their everyday lives, depending on how, through time, people have decided to make use of these ICTs in different social spheres. The main hype around what today is being called ‘new media’ – mobile phones and the Internet, in particular - is that the ‘common user’ (as opposed to the media professional), can now also him or herself generate media content, hence the term ‘social media’ (Hurwitz, 2003; Gillmor, 2006; Levinson, 2004). But these emerging ‘new’ ICTs should not be seen as completely separate from the older ‘traditional’ ICTs. As media professionals begin to turn to the common user-generated information displayed on the Internet for news and commentary, so do the common Internet-users, to a large extent, base their commentary and discussions on the events and issues published and broadcast by ‘traditional’ ICTs. Therefore there often exists an overlap between ‘traditional’ and ‘new media’ with regards to content. Nonetheless, for the purposes of clarity in the present work, the term ‘traditional (mass) media’ refers to the

printed press, radio and television, as media institutions producing and circulating mainstream information to audiences, whether state or privately-owned and controlled. The term 'new (mass) media' will encompass essentially mobile phones and the Internet. 'Social media' will refer more specifically to (a) forms of content produced, collected and shared in the Internet by individuals who are not necessarily journalists by profession, and (b) the platforms in the Internet *where* these forms of content are shared with others.

With regard to 'online' and 'offline' terminology, one of my aims through the present study is to diminish the dichotomising of the two in terms of 'online *virtuality*' vs. 'offline *reality*', since both spaces are social and as such are as much 'imagined' and as 'real' as the other (Nyamnjoh, personal communication, October 2000). Thus for purposes of clarity I shall use the terms: *online*, when interaction takes place in and/ or through the Internet and *offline* when it does not.

Racial categories - white, black, coloured and Indian – are constructed categories from the Apartheid era which still have legal currency in South Africa and have retained a central place in South African discourses and in everyday life. In light of this, I shall use these categories to describe my research contributors, according to how they define themselves and others. 'Racism' is also central in South African discourses. However, given that the aims of this thesis do not include defining what 'racism' is or how people define it, nor looking for attitudes and behaviours that could be considered racist, I shall speak of racism only when it is mentioned as such by the contributors to this study. In my opinion, different people identify racism in different ways, and, even in the role of a researcher, the fact that my background, history and experiences differ from those of many South Africans would in all probability bias my findings.

Finally, as more of a disclaimer than anything else, in this study I do not examine in depth all of the issues I bring to light. Given the amount of time one has at one's disposal as a Master's student to produce a comprehensive study, as well as the constraints of the word count prescription for a minor dissertation, in the process of identifying various issues for examining and exploring, I have prioritised some issues over others and focused on some issues in greater detail than others. Some of the issues could definitely have benefitted from greater levels of substantiation and analysis. For example: how the discursive themes I encountered were interpreted, engaged with and, in turn, shaped differently by different groups in South Africa, or 'communities of practice', influenced by different experiences and

embedded in different everyday life realities, to use Bourdieu's less fixed term (1990), could have provided a deeper analysis and contextualization of the themes. A more comprehensive exploration of media practices, extensively researched and theorized in mass communication studies, would have added to a clearer understanding of the media spotlight on Julius Malema in April 2010. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, probably among many others, I believe I have been able to draw meaningfully on the data I was able to gather within the time and space constraints in order to be able to make some modest claims. Therefore this ethnographic account, like any ethnographic account, as Clifford points out, should be received as a "partial truth" (1986) but nevertheless a valuable and valid contribution to the understanding of a moment in South African contemporary history, to the discipline of Social Anthropology and to the fast-emerging body of studies *in, on* and *using* the Internet.

In summary, this thesis will be exploring the ways in which, on the eve of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™, Julius Malema's statements and actions were widely disseminated and debated in South African traditional media and incited South Africans to voice, discuss and negotiate issues of the 'new' 'post-Apartheid' 2010 South Africa, both online and offline, while exploring the potential richness and value of social research in the Internet for Social Anthropology.



# CHAPTER 1

## ‘NEW’ MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES: A HISTORY OF RECURRING HYPES

The introduction of mass media technologies in societies leaves few indifferent. Individuals, communities, citizens, governments, politicians, businesses and scholars feel intrigued by the media, often perceiving it as having an all-powerful influence on their audiences. An influence understood as being immediate, direct, intended and *effective* in shaping and shifting the attitudes, behaviour and values of individuals and societies. In this first chapter I demonstrate how different media technologies, including the Internet, have been met with hopes and anxieties – ‘hypes’ - throughout time and across societies. These hypes are heightened when media technologies are first introduced in a society, and in some cases, heightened in moments of crisis. This overview of hyped understandings of the relationship between new media technologies and society will make-up the theoretical framework by means of which I will explore the anxieties professed by South Africans in April 2010, when traditional media content seemed to revolve mainly around the possibility of a Race War.

### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ‘NEW’ MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

High expectations and anxieties on the part of societies about revolutionary transformations in people’s ways of living and relating to one another seem always to accompany technological innovations.

Governments for instance, as institutions of power, have often juggled between regarding emerging media technologies as powerful tools which could be used to communicate to, mould or manipulate those under their rule, or as a dangerous means that could be used by others to challenge their power.

Already in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hitler in Nazi Germany and Stalin in the Soviet Union, were avid users of the radio for political propaganda to foster their ideologies, consolidate their grip on power and stifle contestation (Levinson, 2004: 122). Media technologies have also been harnessed by some countries to conquer, dominate or colonise people of other

countries and continents. For example, when the British colonialists first introduced radio communications in Nigeria around the 1930s, they did so ostensibly driven by goals to 'civilize', 'educate' and 'develop' Nigerians into "colonial modern citizens" (Larkin, 2008: 3). This scenario was repeated in other colonies in Africa and elsewhere. Like their colonial predecessors, although no longer accompanied by the rhetoric of 'civilizing mission', in the late seventies and eighties, governments in many newly independent countries all over Africa became enthusiastic supporters and promoters of mass media. They saw in mass media the possibility of quickly and *effectively* bringing about the social and economic changes they desired or sought to impose among citizens of the new 'nation-states' (Schramm, 1964). This was the case in countries such as Ghana, Tanzania, and Mozambique, to cite a few, where charismatic leaders Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and Samora Machel respectively, galvanized the media to promote a national identity, developmental agendas in line with Marxist-influenced socialist ideologies, and to consolidate the power of their one-party regime (Fauvet & Mosse, 2003). In the Middle East, similar strategies were also adopted. In Iran, in the early seventies the ruling Shah had turned mass media into central purveyors of non-formal education in the development of an 'Iranian nation' (Shreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994). In Egypt in the 1990s, as Abu-Lughod (2005) describes in her study of Egyptian television audiences and producers, the latter were often forced to submit their own creative and moral projects to the State's developmental agendas and aspirations of creating a modern Egyptian identity, culture and nation, as well as to the business interests of media corporations to increase viewing numbers.

In other cases, governments were suspicious of the possible effects of unregulated media technologies on society. This was the case of television in Apartheid South Africa. The National Party (NP), Apartheid's ruling regime, feared that the introduction of television into South African society would introduce and spread 'foreign' ideas which went against the regime's main ideology. This ideology was based on legal cultural and racial classifications that segregated South African inhabitants according to a particular hierarchical structure that privileged the white minorities economically, socially and politically. It is hardly surprising therefore that South Africa was one of the last African countries to permit the introduction of television. When in the late seventies, television was finally introduced, its broadcasting services were subject to a prescriptive structural organization that reinforced

Apartheid ideology, content that promoted it, and regulations that thwarted and silenced all anti-Apartheid forces and solidarities. This was already the case with the press and radio which were also subject to the regulations of the Apartheid regime. Publications and broadcasting content was designed for and directed at separate racial audiences – Afrikaans, English and black – but prioritized the white Afrikaans language and culture which represented those in power (Barnett, 1999; Pityana, 2000; Orgeret, 2004; Bergeret, 2004; Durheim *et al*, 2005; Masenyama, 2005; Salo, 2006; SouthAfrica.info, 2006; Wasserman, 2011; and Nyamnjoh, 2010<sup>5</sup>).

Underlying these examples is the perception of an all-powerful media that can influence and transform people and society, directly and immediately, and in accordance with the intentions of those who control it. Halloran (1964) describes this general perception of media influence on audiences as *effective*.

At the establishment of Mass Communication Studies as a discipline, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, studies were focused on mass media's short-term, direct, and *effective* influence on mass audiences. There was a growing curiosity (and concern) of the political, moral and social influences of the press, radio and film in societies (McQuail, 1969). But Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz's studies on the 1940 US elections' propaganda and the lack of significant influence it had on voters' decisions, transformed media studies (McQuail & Windahl, 1981). From then onwards, media researchers and theorists began to pay more attention to: the complex contexts in which communication takes place; media producers and audiences as heterogeneous; and, the process of media content reception by audiences as active rather than passive, with a multiplicity of possible interpretations (McQuail & Windahl, 1981).

Nevertheless, media *effectiveness* perceptions, among individuals, communities, citizens, governments, politicians, businesses and scholars, persist and are especially heightened when the media technology is first introduced in a society.

This was the case with the introduction of the telegraph, the telephone, and traditional mass media (Katz & Aspden, 1997). However these hopes and anxieties surrounding media technologies in their infancy usually subside when the predicted changes turn out to be less dramatic and more embedded in the already existing practices and

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars who have researched intensively and written extensively on South African mass media.

power relations of everyday life (Katz & Aspden, 1997; Wilson & Petersen, 2002). In other words, the hypes subside when the expected effects are not immediate, direct, and transforming: the media communications are not in Halloran's terms *effective*.

In some cases such discourses of *effectiveness* are also revived in times of crisis. Stanley Cohen (1972), in the context of the UK, theorized about the recurrent heightening of particular anxieties in societies in moments of crisis. He called these recurring moments "moral panics". Cohen argues that at various times of crisis in the UK, the mass media played a main role in the revitalization of moral panics by broadcasting massively and widely people's shared anxieties as if these were an imminent reality. To do this the media would often draw on what Cohen calls "folk devils", which can be a condition, an episode, a person or group of persons, considered to be (or constructed as) menaces to societal order, values and interests (Cohen, 1972; Hall, 1974 cited in Procter, 2004; Dowson *et al*, 2004). These would be the ones blamed for *effectively* leading society's anxieties to become a reality, hence the moral panics in such moments of a perceived crisis. I shall make clearer the intersection between Halloran's theory of media *effectiveness* and Cohen's concept of moral panics by introducing the interconnected theoretical framework to the discursive context in South Africa in April 2010.

As described in the introduction of this study, starting in March 2010, perceptions of racial polarization, which had been prevalent in post-Apartheid South Africa (Herman, 2011), were revived by the debate around the "Shoot the *Boer*" song. The debate hinged on the question should the song be accepted as heritage – as part of South Africa's liberation struggle history - or as hate speech (Afriforum & TAU SA v Malema & ANC, 2010; Archival Platform, 2011)? What if Malema's supporters, deemed to be in the majority young black South Africans, took the song literally and began to shoot white Afrikaners, or *Boers* (Archival Platform, 2011)? Already at this point, *effectiveness* was prevalent in these discourses. In the opinion section of the *Cape Times* of April 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, writers were commenting:

"Hate speech is not the way for nation-building, reconciliation and providing equal opportunities for all South Africans" (Peter Dirk-Uys, a famous author, actor and activist in South Africa).

“Young, skilled people are leaving in droves to seek a future in places where they feel welcome and safe. With official endorsement of hate songs like this, who can blame them?” was a question asked by Karl Eintracht from Bergvliet<sup>6</sup>.

Obviously, when Terre’Blanche, a white Afrikaans farmer or *Boer*, and leader of a white supremacist group (the AWB), was murdered by two of his workers, who happened to be two young black men, such discourses intensified. Malema’s hate speech, widely broadcast by the media, had *effectively* resulted in actions. Subsequently white residents of Ventersdorp began marching in protest of the murder, whilst the suspects were being called heroes by black residents (*Cape Times*, April 7 2010). On national television, the white AWB secretary-general verbally clashed with the black political commentator and came close to clashing physically with the black host of the show (*Cape Times*, April 8 2010). And, last but not least, Malema called a journalist a “white agent” in a press conference (*Cape Times*, April 9 2010). With discourses along these lines making up the situation lived in the country during April 2010, South Africa was portrayed in both ‘traditional’ and ‘new media’ as on the brink of a “Race War”. The environment was described as “brittle”, “tense”, “explosive”, to name a few of the adjectives pervasive in the South African discourses I came across, online and offline. Anxieties about a Race War, present in South African society even before the end of Apartheid<sup>7</sup>, were contributing to the widespread moral panic in 2010, just at the advent of a supposedly nation-unifying mega-sports event. Malema, who had the media’s spotlight at the time, was being blamed for the series of events described above and the “tense situation” lived in the country. According to Halloran’s theory, the widespread perception in the media was that Malema had *effectively* led the two black workers to kill the white Afrikaner.

Interestingly, although these discourses of *effectiveness* were prevalent, especially in news reports in the *Cape Times*, in the opinions section of that newspaper, and in the conversations I read and witnessed online and offline, there were South Africans who were also discussing the nuances and complexities of the situation. Halloran’s theoretical contributions to mass communication studies become once again useful in attempting to

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<sup>6</sup> The format in which I cite the authors of the opinion articles – name and residential area – follow the way in which they appear in the *Cape Times*.

<sup>7</sup> This point will be clarified in Chapter 4, where the opinions and discussions among my South African informants will be explored in greater detail.

understand this ‘other side’ of the discussions. According to Halloran, mass media should be seen as a “set of social institutions, interacting with other institutions within the wider social system” (Halloran, 1998: 19), functioning through “a nexus of mediating factors and influences” (Halloran, 1964: 20). Therefore, the influence that mass media can exert rarely, if ever, works in isolation. Interestingly, although I have been demonstrating so far how discourses of *effectiveness* pervade popular discourses and media content, South Africans were simultaneously discussing “the nexus of mediating factors and influences” of the lived context in South Africa in 2010 in the discussions I read and witnessed. Stark socio-economic and political difficulties and inequalities, leadership issues, Apartheid legacies, as well as the traditional media’s “hunger” for sensationalist news, were among some of the other factors and influences discussed as contributing to the generally tense situation in the country in April 2010. Thus alongside discourses of *effectiveness* were some more nuanced and complex discussions of media *effects*, alongside other social institutions, factors and influences at work in South African society in April 2010. In Chapter 4, the ethnographic core of this thesis, I shall illustrate in more detail and specificity these nuances and complexities, informed by the theories I have introduced in this chapter.

In returning to the ways in which expectations surround new media technologies, and given the importance of the Internet as a complementary source of data in this study, it is pertinent to embark here on a brief discussion of the Internet and its presumed ‘democratic’ credentials.

### THE INTERNET: A ‘DEMOCRATIC’ ‘PUBLIC SPACE’?

Currently hopes and anxieties regarding media technologies are focused on the new media: mobile phones and the Internet. Just as in the past, with previous media technologies, hypes around the prospect of mobile phones and the Internet drastically transforming the socio-economic and political orders of societies world-wide are high (Katz & Aspden, 1997). However, these hypes have recently acquired a different tone. Rather than subscribing to the aspirations and agendas of governments, media industries and/ or big corporations and institutions, the general hype is that mobile phones and the Internet will enable societal transformations led by those other than power-holding élites (Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003; Gillmor, 2006, Levinson, 2006).

For instance, in the context of socio-political mobilization by those who feel marginalized by the State, mobile phones have become accessible tools worldwide. In 1992, a challenge to Thailand's military coup was nicknamed "the cell phone revolution", as organizers of this resistance made extensive use of chain-texting – people forwarding a text-message from their mobile phones to their entire contacts' lists and every recipient subsequently replicating the action - to spread the word about the protests (Zunes, 2003). In 2010, the September 1<sup>st</sup> riots in Maputo, Mozambique's capital, sparked by overall increase in living costs, were also largely mobilized through chain-texting. To 'deal with' the riots, the Mozambican government suspended cell phone services in the country for a couple of days and, since then, have required cell phone users to register with a central database (Gunter, 2010).

The important role that communication technologies, not (as) controlled by the State, are able to play in challenging, and even overthrowing a political regime, is not a new phenomenon. Going back to Iran's case in the 1970s where, in order to mobilize different networks in Iranian society to overthrow the ruling Shah - from religious to secular, from literate to illiterate - the country's academic intelligentsia and religious bodies made use of printed fliers and recorded audiocassettes - "small media", as described by Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994). Despite the fact that the Shah's regime was successfully toppled, these alternative media were still limited in terms of scale and time of audience-reach in comparison to State-controlled mass media, such as press, radio and television which have a far wider reach. The new media have made it possible for people to overcome such limitations.

As Levinson has argued (2004), the breakthrough of emerging media technologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be seen in terms of the ability to correspond instantly with anyone anywhere in the world. The focus of this discussion is on the Internet, which although mobile phones should not be excluded, given the interconnectedness of these technologies in recent times, is of particular relevance to this thesis. In the last two decades we have witnessed the growth, improvement and proliferation of the Internet. Moreover, whilst previously, connecting to the Internet meant being stuck to a desk and a computer, now with further technological innovations such as portable computers - from laptops to tablets - wireless Internet connections and Internet-enabled mobile phones, even the obstacle of physical immobility when accessing the internet has been overcome. In addition to long-

distance, real-time social interaction almost anywhere, the Internet today has become a medium whereby Internet-users can seek, exchange and produce information (Gillmor, 2006).

Amongst the pool of possibilities in communication, improved old modes as well as entirely new ones, it is particularly the 'producing' of information that has contributed largely to the widespread hype regarding the Internet: the 'common' citizen, not solely media professionals - controlled or not by élites - can circulate his/her knowledge, information, ideas, opinions, and creations more widely and more quickly than ever before (Hurwitz, 2003; Gillmor, 2006; Levinson, 2004). In his description of the state of media production today, Gillmor quotes American radio commentator Wes Niskeras: "if you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own" (1994, cited in Gillmor, 2006: xi). Besides allowing people in all walks of life to be media content producers, it has allowed products to be shared on 'public spaces'<sup>8</sup> and to reach other 'producing audiences' on an unprecedented scale. While "the television had given the global villages eyes and ears, the Web [the Internet] gave them tongues, expressed for the most part through fingers" (Levinson, 2004: 130).

These 'public spaces', ranging from web-logs (blogs), to online forums, to social networking websites (such as Facebook), constantly evolving and proliferating, as well as the content produced in them, together constitute what has been dubbed 'social media'. Through these social media, the 'common' citizen is able to 'voice' the contentious, contending, contradictory and complementary opinions, needs and desires, of individuals and groups beyond mainstream discourses. Hence, the widespread hype of the Internet as a more 'democratic' medium, in comparison to previous media technologies that in many cases have subscribed again and again to the aspirations and agendas of governments, media industries and/ or big corporations and institutions.

Aspects that enable the extension of media boundaries to 'common' citizens, and add to the hope of the Internet as serving as a more democratic medium, according to Jenkins and Thorburn (2003), include its non-hierarchical structure, low transaction costs, and the possibility of escaping censorship from power-holding élites.

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<sup>8</sup> For now I will use public spaces in quotation marks, given the ambiguity of the notion of public in the Internet, something I will reflect on in Chapter 3, when discussing ethical issues of online social research.



Its non-hierarchical structure is debatable, since, although there is space for everything in the Internet, what appears first on one's search engine depends on a number of factors. In the case of Google's search engine, these factors include: how often the key words one has searched for appear on the website; which websites have been viewed the most by Internet-users in general on that day/ month/ year; the quality of the website<sup>9</sup>; and, the level of reproduction a website has in other websites, in particular the more recent social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter (Google, 2010). One must also not forget that one's search results depend primarily on one's interests and/ or needs, particularities not shared by every Internet-user. Therefore, even on the Internet some information is more visible (literally) than other.

Transactions costs also vary widely, as access to the Internet might not yet be affordable, for instance, in the majority of developing countries where technology, mostly imported, is expensive and where the few existing Internet service providers monopolize the markets (Jensen, 2000). Nonetheless this situation is rapidly changing, a development which I will be exploring in more detail in the next chapter, in order to explain and support my argument for the Internet being a relevant and important social research area and field-site in Africa, despite the concerns of the 'digital divide' between developing and developed countries.

The ability of users of the Internet to bypass the censorship imposed by power-holding individuals is also not a given. There have been several cases of bloggers who have been imprisoned (and even murdered) for posting material on the Internet which was critical of ruling regimes. According to a 2009 report from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ, 2009), online journalists and bloggers make up 45% of all journalists currently in prison, with China, Iran, and Cuba among the top five countries to imprison this group. The US government has also recently launched a strategy to regulate the Internet, with Internet IDs as one of the projected regulations (White House, 2011).

In addition, according to O'Neil in his study of online relationships and politics, although grassroots democracy is favoured in the "stateless system", that is the Internet,

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<sup>9</sup> Low quality websites include spam (unsolicited messaging or advertising), websites that contain sensitive, abusive, objectionable or illegal content, paid websites that bias search results, and websites containing malicious software or malware. These are not allowed and are usually removed by Google (Google, 2011).

“authority runs rife on the Internet” (2009: 2). The reason for this is that since the common-user is producing the material, and there is so much available, producers need to exercise self-quality control in order to distinguish themselves as reliable and pertinent sources of information. This regulation is of a more horizontal nature, coming from other users. Vertical controls are also exercised, as was demonstrated earlier regarding the way in which Google works to evaluate and censor or remove material (Google, 2011).

Such nuances and variations should not detract from or dismiss the validity of the argument that the Internet is a more democratic medium in comparison to earlier mass media which was and continues to be often directly or indirectly controlled by élites, be they media professionals, governments, and/ or big corporations.

In the South African context an example that comes to mind of the Internet acting as a more democratic medium than the traditional ‘old’ media, is the response generated by Gareth Cliff’s article addressed to the Government in October 2010 (Cliff, 2010a). Cliff, a famous and thought-provoking South African radio jockey, posted an article on his blog titled *Dear Government*. In the article he openly criticized corruption, service delivery deficiencies, political disputes and scandals in the ANC governance. The article received several comments online and shortly became a topic of national discussion, across new media and traditional media alike, online and offline. The resulting frenzy led to a meeting between Cliff and the government’s spokesman, Zizi Kodwa (Ndebele, 2010). On the basis of this case one can argue that it is possible that if the ‘provoker’ in the case had not been a celebrity there would not have been such a large body of commentary on the article across media, nor any kind of response from the government. In addition, one could argue, that the variety and richness of comments and discussions generated by the blog would not have surfaced in the traditional media, in part due to publishing and broadcasting space and time constraints. Cliff in his subsequent *Dear Government: the aftermath* blog-article included the role of the internet in revealing the views and feelings of a wide range of South Africans and in generating an illuminating and vibrant discussion. Such a discussion would not have been possible through traditional media:

*What is impressive about this exercise is the increase in the scale of the public debate thanks to the Internet. Immediate, insightful, evolving threads of discussion have unwound from the dissemination of the original letter and this is very encouraging. I am pleased to see that so many South Africans care so passionately about our*

*country, regardless of whether we agree or disagree. The old 'letters to the editor' means of airing issues of importance has been replaced by an organic, direct and instant forum for conversation [...] Let it never again be said that young people in South Africa are apathetic, disengaged and ill-informed. There are new ways of finding facts, starting arguments and getting to the matters which matter (Cliff, 2010b)<sup>10</sup>.*

Cliff's observation encapsulates the democratic nature of the Internet that I want to emphasize on in this thesis and raises the question: could the democratic 'credentials' of the Internet, outlined and discussed in this chapter, allow for a 'public space' for 'nation-negotiation' in South Africa? The process of 'nation-negotiation', as in South African Internet-users voicing, exchanging and discussing, agreeing and challenging, opinions, experiences, attitudes and values, through participating (and observing) in the Internet, especially in social media? 'Nation-negotiation' rather than 'nation-building', since I understand the latter to infer a more linear and incremental process towards a common goal – which, in the context of this study, would be that of national unity, of Mandela's and Bishop Tutu's 'Rainbow Nation'. Hence I use the term 'negotiation' to denote a back and forward process, where discussants agree and disagree in complex and dynamic ways. 'Negotiation' as an interaction taking place within the ever-changing and infinite process of making sense of individual, group and national identities, informed by the historical path of South Africa and set in the country's contexts in the year 2010.

South Africa has come out of a difficult past and social interactions, and despite the leaps made since Apartheid, in many situations continues to be informed and distorted by separatist ideological legacies as well as tangible structural barriers. Living in Cape Town from 2003 to 2010, the separation of residential areas by class, a separation which continues along both class and racial lines, was always visible to me. The wealthier areas are still inhabited mostly by whites, followed by coloureds and the majority of black people still live in poorer areas. As Ross explains, Apartheid's racial classification "has had lasting effects on people's access to material means of survival and also in their explanatory models of the world" (2010: 13). And as described by Sisue Walsh, president of the 2010 Student

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<sup>10</sup> The two articles are no longer available in Cliff's blog hence the alternative sources I provide.

Representative Council (SRC) at UCT, in a set of debates around issues of race, gender and disability, held in October 2010:

*It is as if we can do anything because we are free, but anything we try means nothing because we are jailed by the circumstances that still alienate us [...] I am sitting across someone else and just because of the way they look, I am already judging them and they are judging me and that completely shapes our interaction.*

Revisiting O'Neil's contributions to the debate on the democratic nature of the Internet, throws up an interesting observation: "the user-generated social Internet", what he calls "Web 2.0", "is increasingly a site of peer production of cooperative work. Distributed projects involve thousands of people, located in different places and submitting at different times, contributions that vary widely in scale" (2009: 3). This observation gives rise to the question: what if social media in the "stateless system" of the Internet could become a space where South Africans (those who have access to the space) can exercise a "self-governed" nation-negotiation (O'Neil, 2009: 3)? Does the possibility exist that this 'horizontal nation-negotiation' could take place among South Africans, from different backgrounds, that identify with different 'communities of practice', located in different geographical spaces and submitting at different times – what Hine calls "the time-space distancing" factor that orders interaction online (2000: 6) - contentious, contending, contradictory and complementary opinions? And not only horizontally, but vertically, including the State in this nation-negotiation process, based on the large body of commentary, in its majority online, that Cliff's blog-article gave rise to.

In addition the "time-space distancing" factor could augment the hypothesis of social media as a productive space for nation-negotiation since this factor does not allow for physical violence (Edwards, 1994; Froehling, 1997). Discussions among South Africans, who will obviously not always agree, are 'disembodied' in the Internet. Therefore, unlike the *Africa 360* event, a sudden physical clash between disagreeing participants is not possible.

These are some of the questions that have led me to choose the Internet as one of my fields of research and sources of data with the provision that one should not leap on the bandwagon of the hopes and not analyse the other side of the anxieties dimension of the hype around the Internet. As seen with introduction of previous and older media technologies, the hopes were accompanied by anxieties, concerns and scepticism (Katz & Aspden). With the Internet the situation has been no different.

## OR THE “ILLUSION OF PARTICIPATION”?

Evidently, debates that oscillate between *either* detrimental *or* beneficial effects of media technology on societies and in people's everyday lives have continued to take place over time. As Halloran observes: "Mass communication is alternately blamed for increased crime, violence, immorality and escapism and praised for its educational achievements and social usefulness" (1964: 11). There are always "dour critics as well as ebullient proponents" (Katz & Aspden, 1997: 81). Scholars, as always, have been in the frontline of attempts to gauge and to understand the effects of the Internet on people's everyday lives. Some scholars defend the argument that the Internet has enabled, in certain contexts and at some levels, an increased social interaction and participation, given that it has overcome certain physical space and time constraints (Hine, 2000; Miller, 2011). Others foresee an increasing alienation of the Internet-user in relation to social participation and interaction in life outside the Internet. What Halloran refers to as "escapism" (1964: 11). Turkle (1997) calls this "dropping out of real life", and adds the idea of "illusion of participation", questioning whether what goes on in the Internet translates or transfers into offline everyday life.

Such concerns are not limited to academia. Shortly after the series of events In April 2010, Christoff Smuts, a white Afrikaans South African in his twenties, created a group on Facebook called the *Green Skin Initiative* (GSI). As a "campaign against racism in South Africa" (GSI, 2011), the main principle of the movement was that there is only one skin colour in the single race of humanity, symbolically represented by the colour green - hence the name of the group. To raise awareness about the initiative and their main principle, members organized small gatherings, initially around Cape Town<sup>11</sup>, where they would paint their faces and hands green, and discuss the importance of fighting for non-racialism in South Africa (Smuts, personal communication, October 2010; 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, 2010b). Membership of the Facebook group picked up significantly when the GSI appeared on 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June. It was the second episode of a two-episode series on "Race Relations in South Africa", in light of the recent still fresh April events (3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, 2010b). On their Facebook page, many of the postings resembled the following: "Joined in 2day

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<sup>11</sup> In schools, informal settlements, and more central areas in the city, such as the Green Market Square (GSI, 2011; 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, 2010b).

after 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree [sic]" (June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010). And gatherings expanded to other areas of the country (GSI, 2011). Smuts had been the creator, but refused to call himself the leader of GSI, since GSI was meant to be promoted as a decentralized initiative, in order to institute responsibility in all members to carry out events themselves (Smuts, personal communication, October 2010; GSI, 2011).

In October 2010, when I first met Smuts offline, the Facebook group had reached 20 000 members. In the course of our conversations, Smuts, on more than one occasion, gave credit to the Internet, particularly Facebook for becoming GSI's main space for discussion and organization of events: "Through Facebook, the GSI community *transcends barriers such as place, time*; and, there is no need for formal introductions. And it is also an incredibly useful tool to organize events which *transcend the online realm*<sup>12</sup>, as well as the limits of one's cell phone contacts list" (Smuts, personal communication, October 26 2010).

On the other hand, Smuts also expressed his concern regarding the "too convenient" nature of the fast and large-scale interactions online: "The problem is there are many Internet-users who remain solely digital revolutionists; who are all talk but do not walk the walk" (Smuts, personal communication, October 26 2010).

Smuts was an enthusiast of the space and time obstacles that social media had overcome, as Hine (2000) and Miller (2011); but was simultaneously concerned with the offline unproductivity that the "illusion of participation" could bring about among some Internet-users.

According to Margolis and Resnik (2000, cited in Wilson & Petersen, 2002), these perceptions of 'dropping out of real life' and the 'illusion of participation', grounded on understandings that dichotomize online *virtuality* versus offline *reality* to some extent, were some of the factors leading to the beginning of a general decline in expectations regarding the Internet's revolutionary democratic possibilities – what they called "the normalization of cyberspace" (Margolis & Resnik, 2000, cited in Wilson & Petersen, 2002: 451). A decline in hypes similar to that of previous media technologies. However, if this declining trend was being observed back in the 2000s, this was certainly only until the beginning of the year 2011. Let me elaborate on this last point.

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<sup>12</sup> The italics in Smuts' statement are my emphasis.

## THE 2011 “HASH-TAG REVOLUTIONS”

At the beginning of the year 2011, as the world witnessed the sequential revolutions in the middle-East – “the Arab Spring” - if there had been a decline in the hypes and hopes regarding new media, this trend was certainly reversed and these hypes were revitalized. The Tunisian “Jasmine Revolution” was the first to take place. Despite being the first of all the revolutions that followed in the Middle-East, it was the Egyptian revolution, dubbed the “#Jan25 Revolution”, in accordance with Twitter’s *manière de Tweet*<sup>13</sup>, that drew the spotlight of the international media. As Walid Rachid, a member of one of the youth movements that organized the protests in Egypt put it, “Tunisia is the force that pushed Egypt, but what Egypt did will be the force that will push the world” (Kirkpatrick & Sanger, 2011).

While not detracting from the key role played by the Internet in the mobilization and coverage of the revolutions I would argue that its centrality needs to be questioned and closely examined. Although discussions, exchanges of experiences and planning of the protests among the youth movement groups might have initiated in social networking websites such as Facebook, away from the State’s censorship (Kirkpatrick & Sanger, 2011), the contribution of other media should not be disregarded. Chain-texting through mobile phones, a communication mode to which a much larger portion of Tunisians and Egyptians had access, as well as word of mouth, might have played as important a role in *spreading* information about the revolution<sup>14</sup>. In Egypt’s context, as was reported at the time (Iskander, 2011), it was in fact the government’s decision to cut mobile phones and Internet communications shortly after the first protests that was instrumental in driving a revolution that could have remained ‘digital’ into the streets of Cairo (Preston & Stelter, 2011). However, it was the role played by social media that made the Egyptian and Tunisian

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<sup>13</sup> Tweeter, a social networking platform, where the ‘@’ is used to direct comments (or *tweets*) at specific people, and the hash tag ‘#’ to classify the *tweets* according to topics. All *tweets* related to the Egyptian revolution, before and after, were accompanied by ‘#jan25’.

<sup>14</sup> According to the latest study by the Institute of Economic Studies in the Mediterranean World (IPEMED), released in April 2011, Facebook market penetration of Facebook users in Tunisia and Egypt, which consists of the fraction of Facebook users by the country’s total population, was only 20% and 16.5%, respectively (Sitoe, 2011)

revolutions, successful in toppling their ruling regimes, a novelty<sup>15</sup> - a characteristic of newsworthiness.

The “Arab Spring”, also known as, the “hash-tag revolutions”, at the beginning of 2011 has definitely contributed to a revival of hopes (for those who feel marginalized) and anxieties (for those in positions of power) regarding the new media, social media in the Internet in particular. Nevertheless it is important to keep in mind those critical questions that challenge its all-powerful centrality in these events. The “nexus of mediating factors and influences” (Halloran, 1964: 20) is a useful basis for an analysis of the complex context of the Middle-East’s uprisings. These were undeniably to a large extent made possible by the Internet, but the role of the Internet needs to be seen in interaction with other social processes and social institutions that were also factors in the mobilising and orchestrating of the revolutions. For example, in the case of Egypt, investments in tertiary mass education in the last few decades had not been accompanied by equivalent job creation. In 2008 the government had also tightened its repressive regulations on traditional mass media by creating a regulatory agency allegedly to restrain media producers from damaging ‘social peace’, ‘national unity’, ‘public order’ and ‘public values’ (Iskander, 2011). With economic conditions worsening for most of the population, the educated, but not politically-connected youth was also struggling to find jobs and better living conditions. Significantly, in terms of groups organising and spearheading the revolution, this was also the portion of the unsatisfied Egyptian population with access to the Internet. It was against this background that these young men and women began to organize into the *April 6 Movements*, which was the name of the Facebook group created in 2008 by means of which a very important part of the organization and mobilization for both the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings took place (Kirkpatrick & Sanger, 2011; Aljazeera, 2011).

Hopes and anxieties around the possibility of socio-political transformations through the use of the Internet are at a new high in the interconnected world of today, largely due to the Middle East “hash-tag revolutions”. However, it is important to take into account the

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<sup>15</sup> Iran’s Green Movement in 2009 had already gained a lot of national and international visibility and support globally through the Internet. However, despite the widespread visibility and support, the movement had not yet been able to topple Iran’s ruling regime when the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions took place (Verderosa, 2009).



other socio-economic and political factors, influenced by a particular history that played an important part in these uprisings – the “nexus of mediating factors”.

As several scholars would stress, media technologies are universal; but they are then appropriated in different ways and acquire different meanings in different social contexts (Larkin, 2008; Miller & Slater, 2009; Miller, 2010; Nyamnjoh, 2010; Miller, 2011; Schannell, 2011). In the case of South Africa, mobile phones and social media have not been used to organize a revolution to overthrow the government. But some similarities between South Africa’s and Egypt’s contexts could be pointed out – Media regulations being proposed, a generalized discontent with the stark socio-economic and political inequalities in the country and with the government. Nonetheless, these apparent similarities are superficial. I shall return to this point in more detail in Chapter 4 and in the Conclusion.

Then again, there are other functions the Internet could fulfil in South African society, such as serving as a more democratic space for South Africans to voice, discuss, and negotiate, agree and disagree on issues of concern in the country, compared to traditional media. . This hopeful suggestion I make should not overlook the very tangent issue of unequal access to the medium in South Africa. An issue I shall explore further in Chapter 2.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter I have sought to draw critical attention to the widespread and resilient tendency to see mass media as an all-powerful *effective* medium, influencing and changing individuals’ attitudes and behaviour, and societies’ norms and values, throughout time and across societies. Such perception, theorized by Halloran (1964), together with Cohen’s concept of moral panics (1972), which are recurrent moments of heightened anxieties in societies, will serve as the theoretical framework by which I will be exploring the discussions among South Africans in Chapter 4. In addition, given the importance of the Internet as a source of data in the present study, I have also explored some of the hopes – a democratic role and space – and anxieties – “dropping out of *real* life” and the “illusion of participation” – that have surrounded the new medium. All in all, an important point to keep in mind is Halloran’s point that mass media functions through “a nexus of mediating factors and influences”, rather than in isolation (Halloran, 1964: 19-20).

# CHAPTER 2

## SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE INTERNET

The discipline of Social Anthropology has become known among the social sciences for being flexible enough to conduct research in a vast range of areas – from politics, to economics, to gender and health, among many areas.

However, throughout time, particular field-sites, methods and research areas have been deemed more legitimate than others within the discipline. According to Gupta and Ferguson (1997), this legitimization process has often been consistent with conceptualizations in Social Anthropology that emerged during the infancy of the discipline and which have remained, uncritically, its hallmarks.

In this chapter I set out to demonstrate why, although an unconventional field-site, the Internet, is a 'site' - a non-physical and trans-local site - that holds possibilities for greatly enriching certain studies in Social Anthropology in what is an increasingly interconnected and fast-paced 21<sup>st</sup> century. In turn I would argue that understandings of the social uptake of the Internet in the everyday lives of people would benefit largely from anthropological contributions. This could be the case even in relatively undeveloped countries such as South Africa, and in the rest of Africa, where the rate of Internet access although still low and unequal is rising.

### CONVENTIONAL SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

In the last sub-section of Chapter 1 I mentioned that, although media technologies are universal, the ways in which people use them and make sense of them in everyday life varies according to social contexts (Larkin, 2008; Bruijn et al, 2009; Miller & Slater, 2009; Miller, 2010; Miller, 2011; Schannell, 2011). In this thesis I suggest one particular social uptake of the Internet, specifically social media - that of nation-negotiation among South Africans. However, while exploring more conventional anthropological field-sites – as in physically localizable sites, such as places in the University, soccer fields, bars and cafés in and around Cape Town - the Internet was primarily a field-site – non-physical and trans-local - in which I conducted part of my ethnography.

When I first chose to complement my research with discussions South Africans were having online in 2010, it felt like a daunting task. The main reason it seemed daunting was the question which confronted me: how was I to do 'fieldwork' or 'ethnography' in such a non-physical and trans-local 'field' as the Internet? How was I going to travel to the 'field' and manage to engage in face-to-face participant observation and interaction for a lengthy period in the Internet?

Lysloff, when he first researched a musical community in the Internet, had similar concerns to mine:

*I wondered whether what I was doing really was fieldwork because I never had to go anywhere physically, never had to make demands on my body or endure the tangible hazards that field researchers routinely face. Instead, fieldwork meant spending many late nights in front of my computer, 'travelling' the far corners of cyberspace (2003: 244).*

At the time I was conceiving my research plan, it seemed to me that the Internet was not (yet) a typical field-site in Social Anthropology. Thus fieldwork would have in some ways, to be, untypical too. Would part of the research I was proposing, unconventional due to its online dimension, be recognized as anthropological?

Gupta and Ferguson (1997) proved very useful in appeasing such concerns as they remind us that certain concepts that have remained hallmarks in the discipline have emerged from a particular history. This is the case with particular conceptualizations of 'field' and 'fieldwork'<sup>16</sup>, conceptualizations which emerged with the so-called 'Malinowskian Revolution'.

When in the 1920s, Social Anthropology's *manière de faire* shifted from armchair research, based on the writings of missionaries in 'the field', to that of anthropologists going to 'the field' themselves and staying there for lengthy periods of time embedded in the lives of their subjects, this shift was at the time indeed revolutionary (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Knowledge about certain parts of the world was not easily available back then and anthropologists were likely to go into 'the field' in a state of complete ignorance about their study-subjects. In addition, 'anthropology at home' was not yet legitimized. Thus for both these reasons, there was a need to travel to 'the field' for prolonged stays.

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<sup>16</sup> Because they are *particular* conceptualizations of field and fieldwork and do not account for all forms possible, I shall use quotation marks when I refer to them.

According to Gupta and Ferguson (1997), such conceptualizations of the 'the field' – a distant, exotic geographically-bound physical space - and 'fieldwork' or 'ethnography' – lengthy and intensive face-to-face participant observation – have remained archetypes of Social Anthropology and of anthropological research.

In practice, archetypes are always much looser and complex, hence why anthropologists, throughout time, have been able to break into a vast range of areas that did not fit the conventional conceptualizations of 'field' and 'fieldwork'. The anthropological study of traditional media, or Media Anthropology, is a case in point. Ginsburg *et al* recount how for many years traditional mass media was part of "the taboo topics for anthropology" (2002: 3). It was not only its trans-locality that presented a predicament to anthropological analysis; but it was also too Western, too modern, too close to 'home', to be considered a legitimate area of study in Anthropology. In the late 1980s, mass communication studies began to obtain legitimization in the discipline, as a few anthropologists interested in the introduction and appropriation of media technologies in societies consistently kept trying to break from the shackles of convention. This 'break' was also made possible by wider theoretical and practical shifts and re-directions in the discipline: towards an 'anthropology of the present' and a growing acceptance of 'anthropology at home'. In addition, the importance that traditional media was increasingly having in the everyday lives of people across most societies world-wide was becoming indisputable (Ginsburg *et al*, 2002). Early media ethnographies include the work of Stuart Hall (1980) on the mis-interpretative process of coding and decoding media messages by producers and audiences informed and influenced by different social contexts and experiences. Bourdieu's argument (1984, cited in Spitulnik, 1993) that media interpretation depended on class positions occupied by audiences in society was also a pioneer media study in the discipline. Visual Anthropology and ethnographic film and its associated questions of representation also received significant attention at the outset of the emerging media studies in Social Anthropology (Spitulnik, 1993). Today, anthropological studies on traditional media have proliferated: studies from the likes of Ginsburg *et al* (2002), Abu-Lughod (2005), and Larkin (2008), whom I draw upon in this thesis, are only a few of the many distinctive theoretical and methodological approaches with which anthropologists have contributed to mass media studies.

Nonetheless, the archetypes in question, of 'field' and 'fieldwork', should not be easily dismissed as a mere "caricature that everybody knows, but nobody really takes seriously anymore" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 11), since they still enable certain kinds of knowledge, as much as they discourage others (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Hine, 2000; Ginsburg et al, 2002; Englund, 2006; Nyamnjoh, 2006).

Regarding online social research, the Internet turns archetypal conceptualizations of 'field' and 'fieldwork' on their heads in more than one way. As Lysloff puts it, "websites are not field-sites in the traditional sense" (2003: 236), as they are not geographically-bound physical spaces. And doing research *in* the Internet "does not involve travel in the conventional sense of physical displacement" (Lysloff, 2003: 236). In this sense, although lengthy and intensive participant observation is possible, interaction is 'disembodied', as it does not usually take place face-to-face in the same physical space as other participants.

It can be argued that such characteristics and conditions (or lack thereof) should not make the Internet a less rich field-site for research, or a "site of social interactions" (Miller, 2010: x) less worthy of the discipline's attention. As described in the first chapter, new media technologies have always made possible unprecedented levels of social communication and interaction. For research in the social sciences, this communication and interaction has never been so public and accessible. On the screen of a computer we are able to observe interaction among people unfolding right before our eyes, mapping out everyday lives (Wilson, 2006).

Moreover, it would not be the first time that media technologies have improved research methods. Previous emergent media technologies, such as print, audio and video technologies, enabled researchers to handle data more adequately and efficiently in terms of storing it, analysing it and even sharing it. With the advent of such technologies, researchers have been able to tackle a larger range of research areas more appropriately and in a myriad of ways (Christians & Chen, 2004: 15).

Today there is a "widely expressed doubt about the adequacy of traditional ethnographic methods and concepts to the intellectual and political challenges of the contemporary world" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 3). In the fast-changing and interconnected world of today, by travelling to 'the field', engaging in intensive participant observation for lengthy periods of time, as Malinowski would have wanted, we (social anthropologists) risk producing work that is no longer as relevant to the present nor as useful to the future by the

time it reaches our colleagues, or policy-makers, or whoever our intended and interested audiences are.

The Internet might have just become the latest solution to these 21<sup>st</sup> century concerns, and although it may be understood as unconventional – not a physical definite site where the researcher can physically observe, participate and interact – we should remind ourselves that ‘conventionality’ is dictated by archetypal understandings that have had a particular historical origin and journey (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Halloran, 1998). As such, these understandings should be seen as constructs that can, at certain times, for certain contexts and situations, be deconstructed. Hine (2000) and Markham (2004) suggest that one of the ways to do this in relation to the Internet is to let go of understandings that always conflate field-sites with localities. In particular cases, field-sites should be chosen based on interaction rather than on place: as is the case with the Internet, a site of social interactions, one not separate from other sites of social interaction in everyday life (Miller, 2010).

By adopting such an approach we will be reshaping the organizing principles of research to accommodate the flow and connectivity of research. ‘Accommodate’ should be the word to describe this process, rather than ‘substitute’, because the point is not to denaturalize an archetype in order to propose another, but to complement an academically successful methodological possibility with other apt possibilities. Recognizing more *mobile* methodological possibilities should enable us to enrich anthropological research in a 21<sup>st</sup> century of unprecedented levels of flow and connectivity.

In addition, as Miller suggests, a good anthropological field-site is one that is “suitable for addressing the issues and debates that matter to the discipline [of Social Anthropology]” (2010: 5). The Internet, as a global *site* where social interaction occurs, increasingly becoming embedded in the everyday lives of people, in various ways according to different societies and contexts, should definitely be of the interest to anthropologists.

Miller points out that Social Anthropology is committed to both generalities and particularities, and it can thus “make its major contribution to the understanding of humanity through constantly reconnecting the two without losing a commitment to both extremes” (2010: 9). As he explains it, “Coca-Cola is everywhere, but means slightly different things in each locality” (Miller, 2010: 9). The Internet is universal but the ways it is used, the ways in which people interact in it and generate meaning around it, vary according to social

contexts. Therefore, who better than social anthropologists to account for the nuances and complexities of the nexus of mediating factors and influences that shape the social uptake of this new vast medium?

Ethnographies *in, on, and using* the Internet have been proliferating in the last two decades. Some of the first studies focused solely on the uniqueness of disembodied social interactions online. Turkle (1998) described online social interaction as an illusion of social participation in an invisible online community. Markham (1998) focused on how her informants, including herself, made sense of the Internet: as a communication and information tool, as a place, or as a way of being alternative to offline embodied lived reality. Others have strived to demonstrate the fluidity between online and offline social spaces by exploring online interaction as an instance of cultural production in the everyday lives of people. Edwards (1994) observed how everyday offline Afghan customs and values were abounding in an Afghan computer newsgroup. Miller and Slater (2000) explored the ways in which Trinidadians, in and outside of Trinidad, made sense of their national identity through the Internet. Wilson (2006) compared online and offline youth rave subcultures, demonstrating embeddedness of online interaction in offline interaction while simultaneously acknowledging the differences of physicality and locality of the two. In addition, online ethnographers have also reflected on the (still) unusual process of conducting fieldwork online (Edwards, 1994; Lysloff, 2003). Within this proliferating body of online ethnographies, my study would add to the work that has demonstrated the fluidity of online and offline spaces and interaction, as well as the reflective process of conducting fieldwork in the unconventional field-site of the Internet.

Not only scholars but also students, like myself, have also found rich data online: Joshi (2010) explored identify performance and understandings of public and private spaces on Facebook, among students of the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. Which brings me to my next point: the interest and contribution of social anthropologists to research *in, on, and using* the Internet, should be insightful even in the contexts of African countries, where the social uptake of the Internet might still be overlooked given the limitations of access to the medium. I shall explore and elaborate on this last point in the next sub-section.

## ONLINE SOCIAL RESEARCH IN AFRICA

When it comes to exploring the opinions and discussions of national citizens of an African country, researching in the Internet might raise a few eyebrows. Although on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2011 the United Nations declared access to the Internet a basic human right (Vota, 2011a), there is still a general concern with 'The Digital Divide'.

'The Digital Divide' refers to the idea that the Internet is an ICT not yet accessible to the majority of the population in Africa (and other developing countries), due to (1) the high costs of the technologies themselves and of the Internet services, (2) low levels of general as well as computer-related literacy, and (3) low penetration levels due to infrastructural obstacles as basic as electricity and cell phone coverage in most areas of the continent, as I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1 (Jensen, 2000; Heeks, 2008; Bruijn et al, 2009).

So why not study or use as field-sites for research more accessible media such as the radio? Or the mobile phone, which is also a new ICT, but one that has spread remarkably fast across the African continent (Heeks, 2008; Bruijn et al, 2009; Schannell, 2011)?

I share the opinion that 'The Digital Divide' is a concern which is gradually moving into the realm of rhetoric rather than being representative of reality in the various developing countries. In Africa rapidly changing contexts as a result of globalizing processes have allowed for, and been facilitated by, the introduction and appropriation of emerging ICTs, no longer too far behind the so-called 'First' World. This trend, known in the context of Development as 'leapfrogging' (Heeks, 2008), has been set in motion by a variety of factors.

Internet service costs have begun to drop as more and more service providers have started to enter the market. This is the case in Kenya which has four communication operators and the lowest service tariffs in the continent (Vota, 2011a).

Those who cannot afford personal computers are increasingly able to access the Internet at school or at work. Cybercafés and kiosks - small stand-alone Internet access public units - are also becoming lucrative businesses in several African countries (Jensen, 2000; Bruijn et al, 2009).

The number of development projects formulated around the idea that ICTs are central to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), has dramatically risen in the last decade (Heeks, 2008). Targeting the poorer populations, these projects are contributing



not only to increasing penetration levels in African countries, but also to those in less-developed areas of the countries. These projects have also begun to seek for ways to adapt the technologies to local challenges. In the process of overcoming the challenge of illiteracy levels in these countries, ICT professionals are developing more audio-visual-oriented software. There are also various initiatives to produce Internet content in local languages and content relevant to local contexts. A case in point is South Africa, where Google is now available in Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans.

Mobile phones have indeed become a much more popular and widespread new ICT in African countries (Bruijn et al, 2009; Schannell, 2011). As more mobile phone models able to access the Internet become available, people can access the Internet without a computer, a telephone line or a wireless service provider. Although more expensive than the common 'call and text' mobile phones, Internet-enabled mobile phones are still more affordable than computers as well as more mobile.

Although affordability is important it must not be forgotten that the mobile phone has evolved from a mere tool to a status symbol in many societies across the world (Heeks, 2008; Bruijn et al, 2009, Schannell, 2011). This means that in various contexts an expensive mobile phone may be prioritised over other more basic needs, when financial resources are limited. As Miller pointed out, "Not having things is no evidence that you don't want them" (2010: 5). For example, Blackberries, a brand of mobile phones with software that allows one to connect to the Internet for a single monthly fee, and communicate with other Blackberry-users at no extra cost, has a price range of R1000 to R4000, compared to 'call and text' Nokia phones, which can cost as little as R49.99. Yet the 'Blackberry fever' has caught hold of South Africans, translating into a rapidly increasing number of users, from old to young, from Sandton to Soweto, from Camps Bay to Gugulethu.

Despite these rapid innovations and improvements in Internet access over the continent, the access gap is still wide, both globally and within countries, as Wassermann points out, "there are still imbalances between media-rich and media-poor" (2011: 2). In South Africa statistics show that the majority of Internet users are male, have a high-school or university degree, and earn above the minimum salary (Jensen, 2002). This could suggest that the online discourses I have explored for this study are solely representative of a 'better-off' élite. The possibility of these economic and political asymmetries should not be papered over (Wassermann, 2011).

However, just as Wassermann argues that “the visibility of local-global connections in media should not be mistaken as evidence for equality” (2011: 2), the visibility of such inequality in a country should not be mistaken for no access at all to the information and the accompanying social interaction that takes place in the Internet. During the final writing phase of this thesis, which took place in June 2011, I helped carry out a training program for young soccer coaches (18-30 years old) coming from Senegal, Ghana, and South Africa to Ohio University, in the US. The selection criteria for these coaches were mainly that they had to come from economically poor backgrounds and had to be involved in sports for development initiatives in their communities back at home. Of the twenty South Africans that were selected to go to Ohio, some of whom I got to know well, many did indeed come from challenging backgrounds. Nonetheless, 16 out of the 20 had Facebook accounts to which they had regular access to: either through their own Internet-enabled mobile phones or through their friends’ and families’ phones back at home. Those who did not have a Facebook account set up before the trip to Ohio, left with one, as this was one of the most voiced requests from the whole group of young coaches. Having lived in South Africa for 7 years, I have seen this example replicated in very poor neighbourhoods, which demonstrates the limitations, in some cases, of assuming uncritically that economic poverty equals no access to, or no desire or interest to access the Internet and its increasingly popular social spaces.

We talk of ‘globalization’ in terms of increased interconnectedness between people from all parts of the world. If one were to assume that only the wealthier and literate sectors of the population have access to the Internet, would this imply that only élites with access to the Internet are globally interconnected? Does this mean that information available in the Internet is unavailable to non-Internet-users? As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, information today flows across both traditional and new media. It also flows between and across people with different access to different media. This was demonstrated by the 2011 Hash-tag Revolutions. In Africa, although not everyone has direct access to the Internet (which is still the case with television), information in the Internet reaches non-Internet-users. In turn, information exchanged through other media reaches the Internet. Information which also includes facts, rumours and gossip exchanged through the oldest and most traditional communication medium: word-of-mouth. Thus one can say that

information from different sources and in different forms flows across geographical, social and hierarchical divides.

To finalize, this concern with 'The Digital Divide', if analysed critically, directs our attention to another archetype of the discipline of Social Anthropology, that of 'studying down': studying 'the poor', 'the marginalized' i.e. 'the other' vis-à-vis the anthropologist, who has received formal tertiary education, and, in most cases, has greater access to economic and political means than his or her subjects (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). For the sake of the argument, let us dismiss for the moment the fluidity of communication and restrict those who have access to information in the Internet solely to Internet-users, as in those who have access to the Internet. This would mean that my sources - the Internet, the *Cape Times* newspaper, and UCT students - would be solely representative of the 'better-off' sector of the population, in terms of access to education, jobs, and economic possibilities. According to this description I would therefore be 'studying up' rather than 'studying down'. Would this approach make the present study a less legitimate piece of anthropological research? It would perhaps be seen as less legitimate in some circles of the academy which have remained loyal to some traditions and conventions of the discipline. However, in my view the sources and fields I have chosen for research should not make it a less valuable piece of research. As demonstrated in the first chapter, it is the power-holding élites who have been seen to control emergent ICTs over and over again and have therefore shaped and manipulated the effects of these on audiences, even if not directly, immediately, nor in the way they had intended. Would it not then be useful in terms of the roles and effects of traditional and new media, to explore the opinions and discussions of those perceived to be the more influential sector of the population in South Africa? I would argue that this would yield valuable data, and Miller assists: "Once upon a time anthropologists were associated with only the study of less developed or small-scale societies. I hope those days are gone forever. All people today are equal in their right to the burden of being studied by some or other anthropologist" (2010: 10).

However, as I have demonstrated, 'The Digital Divide', both on a global and national levels, is rapidly narrowing, and is a lot more fluid, than the rhetoric would suggest. I would therefore argue that South Africa, in the top five countries with more Internet-users in

Africa<sup>17</sup>, after Nigeria, Egypt, and Morocco (Internet World Stats, 2011), should be accounted for in the emerging variety of studies on the social uptake of the Internet, in various contexts on a global scale.

## SUMMARY

The essence of this chapter consist of the importance to remind ourselves as academics that research choices are rarely free of academic traditions. An example of these traditions in Anthropology are the notions of 'field' and 'fieldwork', which, dating from the Malinowskian Revolution, still insist on fields that are physically localizable and on physically present fieldwork. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argue that, rather than accepting these traditions uncritically, anthropologists need to deconstruct them. Researchers should not render these traditions irrelevant, but understand that there are other possibilities that can expand and enrich the kind of research increasingly recognized and encouraged in Social Anthropology.

A case in point is that of the Internet, a trans-local, 'disembodied', modern and (still) privileged space. Besides having in the 21<sup>st</sup> century become increasingly embedded in the everyday lives of many people worldwide, the Internet is also a field for social research which is daily becoming more accessible and which is an ideal field for complementing and enriching conventional anthropology with approaches that more adequately account for the connectivity and fluidity of communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even in Africa, where although the 'Digital Divide' is still a reality, since mainly economic inequalities enable and limit access to media differentially, access to information is higher than often assumed. This due to the fluidity of information across different media, the importance and status increasingly attributed to certain ICTs (the mobile phone a case in point) and the recent investments towards improving connectivity in the continent by governments and international organizations.

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<sup>17</sup> According to statistics from March 31 2011, South Africa had 6 800 000 Internet-users and a penetration percentage of 13. 9% (Internet World Stats, 2011)

# CHAPTER 3

## AN 'ON' AND 'OFF' RESEARCH PROCESS

As discussed in the previous chapter, conceptualizations that have remained archetypes in Social Anthropology have at times privileged some field-sites, methods, and research-areas over others. Conventional ethnography, as Malinowski devised it, is not entirely adequate for researching in the trans-local, non-physical field-site of the Internet. Consequently those who locate their studies in the field-site of the Internet have had to become what Denzin calls "online *bricoleurs*" (2004), dealing with "the paradox of conducting a non-traditional ethnography in a non-traditional nonspace, with traditional sensibilities" (Markham, 1998: pg. 62).

In this chapter I describe my own methodology, in which I complemented conventional methods in conventional field-sites, with methods adapted to the not so conventional field-site of the Internet. I also discuss the ethical issues, old and novel, I encountered along the way of my own *bricoleuring* process.

### *BRICOLEURING FIELDS AND METHODS*

Accommodating flow and connectivity in social research, as was stressed in the previous chapter, is easier said than done. Let me elaborate.

The questions Gupta and Ferguson (1997) raise are pertinent: when do we, as social scientists interested in a wide range of aspects of people's lives, ever stop doing 'fieldwork'? Or when are we really out of 'the field', given the interconnected world we live in today? Nyamnjoh's contribution is also instructive: "If you are passionate about a theme and have a way with people, rich ethnographic insights flow your way through interactions with others anywhere, anytime" (2005: 297). Drawing on these pertinent reflections and experiences, I could say that in a sense I have been in 'the field' i.e. South Africa, for the past seven years, observing and participating in South African everyday life, leaving for brief periods every year during the June and December holidays. Periods that could be seen as important in terms of temporarily removing myself from 'deep immersion' in 'the field' in order to regain 'objectivity'.

However, to simply state that the material that has fed into the present thesis has had its origins in a variety of sources, situations, experiences, interactions, settings, and contexts, would not fit into the framework of formalities and conventions for presenting academic work. Therefore, in order to comply with at least some of the conventionalities of academic work, I shall provide an outline of my “multistranded” fieldwork (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 37) which in formal terms spanned 2 months, from September to October 2010.

My interest in Julius Malema was first sparked in April 2009 when I attended one of the speeches he gave at UCT. Malema was rallying for Zuma ahead of the presidential elections due to take place in the following month. In the middle of a crowded Jameson Hall, with students squeezing in wherever they could, on chairs, on tables, on the floor and standing, the ANCYL leader declared:

*Forces that are opposed to our revolution are still here. We must change the management of this university and also the lecturers. This is our university, we must change the look of this university, [it] should reflect South Africa (Mtyala, 2009).*

This assertion was met by several boos from the crowd, to which Malema quickly retaliated by saying that those who were booing should not “provoke” him, or the ANC.

The event made the top news in the national media, including the *Cape Times* (Mtyala, 2009), describing Malema’s statements as “threats” to the University’s management, lecturers and students. It was not the first time the ANCYL leader had sparked such media frenzy, nor was it to be the last time that year, as I shall describe in detail in Chapter 4.

But it was following the April 2010 events that I decided I wanted to explore the ways in which Julius Malema’s statements and actions, widely broadcast in South African mass media, had incited South Africans to voice and discuss prevalent issues in South Africa 2010.

Most of the material that originally sparked the idea for this research, I encountered on a daily basis during the month of April 2010 in South African traditional media. Newspapers being the more readily accessible media in the archives of the UCT library, I began to draw my data from news reports and opinion articles published during the month of April in *The Cape Times*, a daily newspaper. News reports helped me to understand the ways in which media professionals were framing the events in April 2010. Opinion articles

served as a means of gathering the voices of non-media professionals. Concurrently I conducted face-to-face informal individual conversations and group discussions with UCT South African students.

In the field of the Internet the social media were rich in opinions, conversations and arguments concerning the key-events. In the proliferating variety of these 'public spaces', I was able to observe a voluminous amount of data relevant to my research question was being produced on a daily and even hourly basis.

I had intended to accommodate flow and connectivity in my research, as well as to push the boundaries of conventional ethnography. However, in order to make my research feasible within the conventional parameters of a minor Masters dissertation, I had to establish boundaries within the vast and rich field of the Internet. As LeBesco points out, regarding the high volume of data in online research, "Ethnographers are both blessed and cursed by having access to complete electronically stored transcripts of all conversational transactions" (2004: 69). I therefore decided to limit my field-site in the Internet to public discussions taking place within particular Facebook groups. These groups would remain unnamed for certain ethical reasons which I will discuss in the following section. "So why Facebook? ", some of you may ask.

### WHY FACEBOOK?

Facebook has developed as a unique phenomenon in the vast range of social media available on the Internet. Facebook was created in 2004 and by 2010 the number of Facebook active members had reached the 500 million mark. Fletcher (2010) helps us to visualise the size and scale of this membership base: "If the website were granted terra firma, it would be the world's third largest country by population". Although it was created in the US and initially intended to be a University social network, today over 70 per cent of its users are spread all over the world and "research needs to encompass this increasing diversity" (Miller, 2011: x).

In South Africa the latest statistics for 2011 indicate that 4 359 860 people are active users of Facebook, which means only 8.88% of the population (Socialbakers, 2011). However, the size of this figure, apparently small, should not be undervalued. The percentage of Facebook users in Egypt at the beginning of 2010 amounted to only 4.3% of

the population (Alidina, 2010), and in 2011 the social medium played a key role in the Hashtag revolutions.

Besides the degree of its popularity, another characteristic of Facebook that influenced my choice of niche was that Facebook departs from the model of other social networking websites, in which the general rule is that participants meet first online and then proceed to meet offline (or not). Facebook is primarily about connecting people online who already know each other offline. Thus the term 'friends' is used to refer to those who are given authorization by the Facebook member to access his/ her profile. Secondly, participants connect with friends of friends and join groups based on common interests. This is substantiated by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe's research on Facebook, from which they observed that "Facebook users engage in 'searching' for people with whom they have an offline connection more than they 'browse' for complete strangers to meet" (2006, cited in Ellison *et al*, 2007: 1144). This creates a tendency for Facebook users to use their 'offline identities' in order to be recognized by those they already know offline and further grounds the claim that online social interaction is embedded in that which occurs offline (Miller, 2010) Or has increasingly become the case.

My research focus was on interaction among Facebook users brought together into discussions by a common topic interest: Malema and the events in April 2010. It was not focused on their offline/online friendships. For this reason, I chose to further narrow my niche and look at discussion groups on Facebook which, in my experience, bring together discussants who are not necessarily friends, around a common interest.

The criteria that dictated my choice of groups were that they had to have been created shortly after the series of events in April 2010 and that these events had to be central to the discussions. A more practical reason informing these choices was my access to the groups. Let me elaborate: by access in this context I mean the ability to observe and participate in the discussions taking place within the groups. In Facebook, with regards to access, there are three kinds of groups: (1) a private group, membership for which you need to apply for authorization from the administrator(s) of the group; (2) a group you can access simply by joining it, which only involves clicking the 'join' button, thus requiring no authorization requests, and (3) a group you can view and participate in with no restrictions, without having to join it. The groups I chose all fell under the third category.



According to Morton (2001, cited in Braucher, 2005), the online social researcher can choose between two methodological approaches: a distanced or an involved approach. In the former approach, the role of the researcher is limited to observation of the interaction<sup>18</sup>. Edwards (1994) calls this 'lurking', as in simply observing an interaction without making one's presence known to the participants. In the involved approach the researcher not only observes but also participates in the interaction. Most of the time I restricted myself to the first approach, observing the conversations taking place on the 'wall' of these groups. I opted for this choice because I wanted to grasp the themes that were emerging in the conversations *without my interference in them* (a familiar anthropological classic, wouldn't you agree?). The 'lurking' approach might raise ethical flags, but I shall elaborate on its ethical-ness in the following sub-section.

With the informants I did interact with, I highlight that most of the interactions did not take place *either* exclusively online *or* offline. For example, in the case of Christoff Smuts, the creator of the GSI, I first interacted with him through Facebook, then met him personally and had a few face-to-face conversations, which were complemented by the Facebook chats<sup>19</sup>. With the UCT students, also my main informants, those whom I did not know prior to the research I interacted with for the first few times face-to-face, but subsequently, due to our time and commitment constraints and incompatibilities, continued our conversations through e-mail and private messages on Facebook<sup>20</sup>. With informants I already knew beforehand, crossing between online and offline interaction was already customary of in our interactions.

Texts, in *The Cape Times* and on Facebook, were chosen based on their relevance to my main research interest – Julius Malema. The recurrent themes, some of which I describe in Chapter 4, were identified by employing 'content-analysis', as in paying attention to the repetition of certain words, phrases, ideas, alongside 'discourse-analysis' i.e. analysing certain discourses by taking into account the context in which they were

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<sup>18</sup> This kind of interaction I will sometimes refer to as 'posts' since, especially in the case of Facebook, opinions, comments and responses are 'posted' on the 'wall', which is the name given to the main web-page of a group or of an individual's profile, in which the interactions taking place are viewable.

<sup>19</sup> Chats allow Facebook users to hold individual private conversations with each other in real-time.

<sup>20</sup> Slightly different in nature from Facebook chats, Facebook messages allow users to hold individual or group private conversations which can be checked in real-time or in the users' own time.

deployed, onto my data (Fielding & Lee, 1998; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The themes were first identified in *The Cape Times*, as these were the texts I looked at first. The original themes were then enriched, reformulated and polished as I analysed the texts online and conducted the offline interviews.

Exploring three sources - UCT students, *The Cape Times*, and Facebook – allowed me to triangulate some of the themes. It also demonstrated the fluidity of discourses across the different media as well as online and offline. This fluidity had been my point of departure on why new and traditional media, online and offline interaction could (and should) be compared. In addition, the triangulation approach allowed me to modestly scale-up certain themes: from students at UCT, to *The Cape Times*' readers, as in a primarily Capetonian group and readership (SouthAfrica.info, 2006), to South Africans with access to the trans-local field of the Internet. Abu-Lughod suggests in her study of Egyptian television that exploring key institutions which are sites for the production of a national culture allows one to write ethnography on a nation (2005: 7). Miller and Slater did this in Trinidad by exploring the ways in which the Internet informs so much on what "being Trini" means (2009: 1). I am not suggesting that in my modest explorations I have been able to do this in the case of South Africa. Nonetheless, I began to explore a *site* that, although not yet accessible to everyone in the country, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, can to some extent inform us about some of the general perceptions around a particular situation in the country, at a particular point in time. 'General', given that communication flows across traditional and new media, and that both online and offline *sites* of interaction are increasingly becoming more fluid, and their boundaries blurred.

As social interaction in the Internet becomes increasingly part of everyday life and in interaction with other media in South Africa, in the African continent and in the world, so does the richness and potential of this new field for social enquiry. However, alongside this development, new (and old) ethical challenges (re)emerge.

### ETHICAL REFLECTIONS: CONSENT, PRIVACY AND INTERPRETATION

Various organizations, from Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, to the Electronic Frontier Foundation, to Cyber Rights and Cyber Liberties, to the Internet Engineering Task Force, and the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), to cite only a

few, have been continually discussing and developing a set of 'netiquette' guidelines to better equip online social researchers to deal with ethical challenges in online social research. However these initiatives are still a work in progress and there is as yet not much consensus around various issues (Ess, 2002; Williams & Robson, 2004).

According to Sveningsson (2004), the point where many online researchers agree is that ethical questions and dilemmas that emerge during research in the field of the Internet are not adequately addressed, if addressed at all, by existing conventional ethical guidelines. The truth of the matter is that, from amongst the possibilities of ethical challenges that can arise during research in general (not just online), there are still many which are not addressed by the multitude<sup>21</sup> of existing conventional ethical guidelines (Hine, 2000; Sveningsson, 2004; Ess, 2002).

The ethical issues and difficult situations that one comes across in research are sometimes set in significantly more complex and intricate dynamics, which require both tough and imaginative decisions, not accounted for in prescriptive ethical guidelines. At the end of the day it is our responsibility as researchers to reflect carefully on the consequences our research might have for others, as well as on the influence that our various roles as professional, social and individual beings might have in interpreting, selecting, framing and presenting research findings. Although adequate solutions are sometimes hard to find, one should always try to address such challenges to the very best of one's ability.

In acknowledging the complex dynamics on which ethical issues emerge and the difficulty of finding appropriate solutions, I discuss in this section the three main ethical issues that I grappled with throughout my research (including the gathering, analysis and write-up phases). These were: how to gather informed consent from all the participants that I observed interacting on my computer screen? What is private and what isn't private in such a 'public space' as the Internet? And my third concern had to do with my own 'objectivity' as a researcher interpreting mostly textual-based interaction in a non-physical or 'disembodied' field.

Regarding the difficulties around the issue of obtaining informed consent, since I was looking for trends in conversations among South Africans in Facebook groups' discussions, I

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<sup>21</sup> Since what is considered moral and ethical varies, to some extent, according to social and cultural contexts, as well as over time (Nyamnjoh, 2006).

realised that the higher the number of discussants I had access to the better. Now, the difficulty was how to get consent from each and every one of these discussants interacting on my computer screen? This question led me directly into the dilemma of the ambiguous nature of the term 'public' to describe social media spaces and interaction in the Internet.

Williams and Robson (2004) aver that using contributions available in the field of Internet for research purposes without the express permission of their contributors might constitute an invasion of privacy, even though the space in which these contributions are being made can be said to be a 'public' space. Research has highlighted that although participants in the Internet are aware that the space is public – visible to other Internet-users – there are particular characteristics of the space of the Internet that leads people to “reveal more about themselves within online environments than would be done in offline equivalents” (Williams and Robson, 2004: 30). These particular characteristics include the ‘time-space distancing’, which has been discussed in previous chapters, and the anonymity and the sometimes ephemeral nature of Internet interactions. On Facebook, although privacy concerns have been an issue ever since its creation, and despite the company’s incessant readjustments of privacy controls, “the willingness of Facebook’s users to share and overshare” persists (Fletcher, 2010).

However, some online social researchers present the counter argument that using information available in the Internet is “ethically defensible” since participants are aware that their contributions are taking place in a public domain (Edwards, 1994; Bordia, 1996, cited in Roberts et al, 2004; Williams & Robson, 2004). In the case of Facebook people are now able to adjust their individual privacy levels to ensure that only their ‘Facebook friends’ are authorized to access everything they post in their individual profiles. This does mean that every user does so.

In the case of my own research, I was not accessing the individual profiles of participants. I was focusing on the content of what people were posting in the Facebook discussion groups which, according to my methodological choices, were accessible to every Facebook user, with no restrictions in terms of having to apply for membership or to request authorization. Therefore, given such choices, I was able to mitigate the ambiguity of the term 'public', arguing that - discussions taking place in open Facebook groups were public in the sense of being open to all internet users. However the question of informed consent remained: how to get consent from each and every discussant in these groups?

Interestingly, I found some answers in conventional ethical challenges within the discipline of Social Anthropology. In October 2010 I attended a public debate organized by the UCT's Student Representative Council (SRC) on current issues of race in the country. The event was attended by at least 100, mostly UCT, students. At the time I was not expecting the debate to bring up issues around the April 2011 events. I found I had stumbled upon valuable data for which, in terms of asking for informed consent from some of the students who contributed to the debate, I had not prepared. How feasible would it have been to run after each contributor once the debate came to an end?

This raised critical questions that cut across offline-online ethical challenges: how is using information one has gathered in the field-site of the Internet without consent any different from anthropologists including in their ethnographies interactions that they have just ephemerally witnessed and/ or participated in, without the express consent of those involved in those same episodes? Is not 'lurking' comparable to the conventional method of observation, where those observed are, more often than not, unaware of your role as a researcher and the implications of your research for them? Can anthropologists ever affirm that all those who were included in their ethnographies - be these key, secondary informants or even just 'figurants' - were all a priori thoroughly briefed on the research topic, process and possible outcomes?

I know I certainly cannot. One of the key participants in this research - Julius Malema - has to date not been duly informed, despite my repeated efforts to get in contact with him through e-mail. Another question we as ethnographers should ask ourselves is: how ethically appropriate is it for the researcher to impose himself/ herself on her/his informants by 'hanging out' in their daily lives for the sake of producing ethnographic fieldwork which is in accordance with the traditions of the discipline?

These critical reflections do not suggest that I did not duly inform any of the contributors to this study. As I mentioned in my methodological description, although I mainly 'lurked' in Facebook discussions, the UCT students that contributed to this study, as well as Christoff Smuts, agreed a priori to do so.

Nonetheless, as I saw myself in the write-up phase of this research, I began to feel that more important than informed consent from online discussants, given that they were participating in a public space already, was the issue of protecting the privacy of those whose online contributions I was going to include in this study.

One of the most common conventional strategies employed to protect informants' privacy in the sense of not allowing their descriptions and contributions to be traced back to them, is to use pseudonyms, in addition to filtering some of their background information (Durham, 2006). Thus in this thesis I have used pseudonyms for the UCT students. I have not done so for Christoff Smuts who "did not mind" being identified (personal communication, October 2010). I have used the names of the authors of the opinion articles as they were published in the 'public domain' of the *Cape Times*, to not overlook intellectual property rights.

In online social research, ensuring anonymity of participants proved more challenging. In this field the use of pseudonyms is not enough to ensure anonymity since one can easily Google<sup>22</sup> a quote and trace its author. Much of the information on Facebook is not searchable by Google. However, the opinions posted in public discussion groups are searchable. This ethical dilemma is also summed up by LeBesco's earlier observation on online social research: "Ethnographers are both blessed and cursed by having access to complete electronically stored transcripts of all conversational transactions" (2004: 69).

As I mentioned earlier, ethical dilemmas are usually more complex and require solutions not accounted for in prescriptive ethical guidelines. Nonetheless, one can still find some useful answers and ideas in these guidelines. I decided to follow IAoR's two main recommendations: to evaluate the degree to which the medium was public, and the degree of sensitivity of the shared information (Ess, 2002; Haythorn & Shoemaker, 2004). The former recommendation I had already had in mind when choosing my research niche. Regarding the latter recommendation, although the term 'sensitive' can be as ambiguous as the term 'private', it influenced which contributions I chose to include in my thesis. Race, a central issue in the statements and discussions that gave rise to and to a significant extent shaped this thesis, is a sensitive subject, particularly in the case of South Africa, given the term's associations with discriminatory attitudes, practices and legislation during Apartheid. Therefore, what I considered to be offensive comments in that respect I opted not to include in the study.

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<sup>22</sup> A new term to describe the action of using search engines in the Internet, of which the most famous one is Google, hence, the name.

I still used pseudonyms for online discussants, whose contributions I included in this thesis, despite the high traceability of their quotes online. Should I have paraphrased most of their contributions rather than using quotes? But then, how adequately would I have (re)presented what people were saying? This led me to final concern, that of my own role as an online researcher evaluating and interpreting primarily textual data.

Nyamnjoh sums up the difficulties of being 'objective' as a researcher: "As social scientists, in particular, we cannot pretend to be above the influence of our backgrounds, beliefs, wishes, motives and emotions, or those of others" (Nyamnjoh, 2006: 6). Given these influences operating on a researcher, it is crucial that s/he remain at all times critically reflexive of his/ her role in filtering and interpreting data. Be it in online or in offline social research. Interaction in the field of the Internet is no longer restricted to text. There are videos, images, sound and 'smileys' (as in the punctuations that translate emotions, such as :) to mean happy, in most contexts). On Facebook, in addition to all of these, there is also the popular 'like' button<sup>23</sup>: the action of clicking it carries a disparate range of meanings, in itself a rich niche rich for researchers. Nonetheless, at the time I gathered my online data I decided to restrict it to text.

The 'disembodied' nature of this part of the research meant that there was no facial expression, no body language and no speech tone to use as additional cues for data interpretation. This is another aspect to add to the unconventionality of doing fieldwork in the field of the Internet, as it does not always<sup>24</sup> fit the face-to-face archetype of anthropological fieldwork. Using Gupta and Ferguson's example made me question a few assumptions about conventional fieldwork. For instance, interacting face-to-face within the same physical space does not automatically confirm the informant's reliability nor does it ensure increased 'objectivity' on the part of the researcher. People are not necessarily honest simply because they are engaging with another person face-to-face, just as anthropologists and social scientists are not all expert lie-detectors. Additionally, visual

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<sup>23</sup> The 'like' button is an icon that appears below every post, be it textual, visual or auditory, whereby people click, usually to say they like and/ or agree with the content of the post. 'Liking' a post can be a response to the post by itself; but it is often followed by a comment by the same person who 'liked' the post.

<sup>24</sup> Hardware, such as web-cams, together with software, such as Skype allows online face-to-face interaction.

characteristics and expressions can equally be cues as they can be misleading, since the possibility always exists that the researcher could be (mis)interpreting them from his/ her own subjective point of view, as was argued above by Nyamnjoh (2006). As a result of his/ her background and experiences the researcher holds certain assumptions about facial expressions, body language and speech tone which are not necessarily an accurate reflection of the participant's feelings and intentions. Such assumptions influencing and shaping interpretation of data would not be made if the interaction was not taking place face-to-face.

Physical appearance is another cue that can be as informative as it can be misleading in interpreting data. In Facebook physical appearance cues are available to a limited extent when users have their photos on their individual profiles. These photographs are posted alongside their contributions to discussions. It is a given that I made use of the photos of discussants to glean some information about them such as their race (black, white, coloured, Indian), their gender, and their ages. The contributions themselves yielded additional cues. However I decided to focus on the content of the contributions. Greater familiarity with the discussants' profiles and the history of their contributions in the interests of gleaning information about their backgrounds would have added to the analysis of their contributions. However, given the subjective nature of the process of interpreting such cues, as I and other scholars have discussed, it would in all probability have led me to make unsubstantiated assumptions about their backgrounds. Then again, my research focus was on recurrent themes and their nuances, rather than on understanding or familiarising myself with the contributors themselves. It was this focus that led me ultimately to the decision to quote contributions verbatim rather than paraphrase them and to allow the themes to emerge from the contributions.

Thus there exists general agreement on the element of subjectivity in the interpretation of data in whatever form it is available, not just in relation to text-based data. While text-based interaction may be devoid of many conventional cues, it should not be dismissed as any less rich informative data for social anthropologists. As Markham (1998: 210) suggests: "Just as the text cannot capture the nuance of the voice, the voice cannot capture the nuance of the text".

To conclude this section on ethical issues around ethnographic research, the drive to gather more in-depth information from people should not become a process detrimental to



them. It is the responsibility of the researcher to protect informants' privacy, rights, and security. At the same time, the researcher should still be able to produce a high-quality, reliable piece of academic or professional work. In my own encounters with ethical dilemmas in this research, I found consolation in Durham's proposition: "The most unethical anthropological writer is not one who reveals what he shouldn't or fails to reveal all that he should, but one who fails to feel uneasy about whatever option he has chosen" (2006: 18). In the end, I can say that I have faithfully and diligently recorded the contributions and contributors to this thesis and have dealt with the ethical issues that emerged to the best of my abilities.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have described the ways in which I have complemented explorations in the Internet, specifically Facebook, with offline discussions among UCT students, and with articles in the *Cape Times* newspaper, in order to explore the discourses of South Africans around the April 2010 events.

By using the approach of crossing between online and offline fields and interaction, alongside a triangulation approach between the three sources, I aimed to devise a methodology that did not dichotomize online and offline social interaction, nor separated new media from traditional media in the context of South Africa. My choice of Facebook, as my research niche amongst the vast field of the Internet, I saw as a contribution to the process of dissolving further such binaries or dichotomies. Ellison sums up the role of the Internet in 'bridging' this divide, by describing Facebook as "a rich site for researchers interested in the affordances of social networks due to its heavy usage patterns and technological capacities that bridge online and offline connections" (Ellison *et al*, 2007: 1144).

Finally, I reflected on some of the key ethical issues that emerged in my exploration in the Internet. These were: how to obtain informed consent from the large number of participants in social media, notions of privacy in the 'public space' of the Internet, and the 'objectivity' of an online researcher when engaged in interpreting mostly textual-based interaction.



# CHAPTER 4

## WHAT SOUTH AFRICANS HAD TO SAY ONLINE AND OFFLINE

In his examination of Facebook Miller argues that “the starting point for an anthropologist researching Facebook is that there is no such thing”, because Facebook has become a cultural production that varies across social contexts (2011: 158). Miller’s suggestion of the adoption of this approach for research on Facebook is based on his extensive and intensive research on Trinidadians’ use of the Internet and Facebook (Miller & Slater, 2009, Miler, 2011). In this study, I have not done sufficient research to be able to come up with a definitive answer to the question “What is the ‘South African Facebook’?” Facebook was primarily a field-site for my research. It was only after observing the conversations and debates that were emerging in online discussions among South Africans during the month of April 2010, which resonated with offline discussions and debates, and those present in traditional media, did I suggest a ‘use’ of the medium among South Africans – that of nation-negotiation. This is one use among many other uses to which the medium is put by South Africans.

In this chapter – the ethnographic core of this thesis – I briefly analyse the media spotlight on Julius Malema through media theories and practices of framing, of news value and agenda-setting. I also present and explore some of the recurring themes that emerged from the opinions and discussions on Julius Malema and the April 2010 incidents shared by South Africans, online and offline. There were many more recurring themes, related to religion, to generational clashes, to mention a few. However, I opted to explore the themes which demonstrated the resilient tendency to see mass media as an all-powerful *effective* medium, as Halloran would have expected (1964). However, the opinions and discussions also showed a complex interaction of such perceived effectiveness with an understanding of other “mediating factors and influences” in South African society in the year 2010.

## “JUJU BABY” UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

“It’s not so much a *dilemma* as it is a Malema”

In the opening keynote address for the Anthropology Southern Africa (ASnA) Conference held at the end of 2010 in East London, South Africa, and which I attended, one of the keynote speakers began her intervention in one of the debates with the above statement. The question being debated was on to what extent Social Anthropology should be engaged in global political matters, including South African political matters. The intervention was greeted with loud laughter. However, what could have simply have been intended as an icebreaker, shed light on how Julius Malema had become a central topic in discussions among South Africans that year, including those in the realm of academia.

April 2010 was not the first time Julius Malema had been at the centre of media spotlight. The ANCYL president had already received a good dose of media attention during Zuma’s candidacy for the 2009 presidential elections. It is important to note that Zuma’s presidential candidacy had its own spotlight: on September 21<sup>st</sup> 2008, former President Mbeki resigned his role as leader of the country due to internal struggles within the ANC. This struggle became understood as the Mbeki-Zuma power struggle (*Behind the Rainbow*, 2008). Simultaneously, Zuma was being criminally charged with corruption with regards to the notorious “arms deal”<sup>25</sup> as well as with the rape of a young woman. South African opinions were divided: some were of the opinion that it was completely outrageous to elect a president who was being charged with numerous criminal offences; others were motivated by his populist charisma (the lack of which President Mbeki, a more business and international relations-oriented leader, had often been criticised), and were certain that the charges against Zuma were all part of a political plot to frame the promising candidate falsely (*Behind the Rainbow*, 2008).

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2008, the recently-elected ANCYL leader, Julius Malema, rallying for the new ANC candidate for the presidential elections, declared that “The ANCYL is willing to kill for our president [Zuma]”. This statement was inevitably plastered all over the news and became the topic of several opinion-pieces and debates nation-wide (Bauer, 2011).

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<sup>25</sup> The “arms deal” was a business deal to modernize and update weaponry in the South African military, in the course of and subsequent to which accusations regarding irregularities in the tenders were made which involved several government officials, including Jacob Zuma, and former President Thabo Mbeki ahead of the 1999 elections (*Behind the Rainbow*, 2008).

Already at this point, labels of hate speech were being put affixed to Malema's statements and questions being raised about the kind of example the ANCYL leader was setting for the nation (Bauer, 2011).

In August 2009, another crucial episode put Malema in the media's centre-stage. Athlete Caster Semenya had just won the World's Athletics Championships 800-metre running gold medal in Berlin with an exceptional record. So exceptional, that it turned into an investigation regarding her gender. The Olympics track and field governing body was suggesting the possibility of hermaphroditism and questioning the legitimacy of her title, medal and prize-money. This gave rise to "one of the biggest gender verification scandals in the world of sports" (Letsoalo, 2009; Foxsports, 2009). The controversy was at its peak when Semenya returned to South Africa. The ANCYL leader, among other politicians and South African fans, was at the airport to welcome and congratulate her, and to re-direct the focus on the gender component of the controversy to that of an issue of race. Malema was declaring that the Olympics governing body was questioning Semenya's gender because she was black and that the "white-controlled media" was fomenting the controversy for the same reason (Letsoalo, 2009; Foxsports, 2009). In addition, he emphasized that the South African nation was still divided by making an example of white South Africans who had not come to the airport to show their support for the young black South African athlete (Letsoalo, 2009; Foxsports, 2009). Once again, Malema and his statements became a topic for national discussion in the course of which he was characterized as "controversial", an author of "hate speech" towards white South Africans, a menace to the aspirations of unity in South African society, of not respecting the ANC's vision of a "non-racial, non-sexist, democratic society", to cite a few of the common narratives. In traditional media he would often appear framed as "*l'enfant terrible*", the terrible child causing disruption in the country or the "Juju baby", the ANCYL leader 'crying out' for attention and not controlled by the elder leaders of the ANC.

These pre 2010 episodes demonstrate that the media spotlight on Malema and the centrality he gained in South African society in April 2010 was not overnight phenomenon. Nor was this status confined to the month of April. Malema had already become a prominent topic of discussion in South African everyday life even before singing the "Shoot the Boer" song and engaging in a quarrel with a journalist at a press conference, or defying both the High Court's ruling to ban the "Shoot the Boer" song as and the ANC's authority by

continuing to sing the song during his visit to Zimbabwe, where he also publically expressed his support of President Mugabe and his party. (Archival Platform, 2011; Bauer, 2011).

However, the spotlight on Malema was particularly bright in April 2010. During that month the frequency of newsworthy events involving Malema turned Julius Malema into what Tiung and Hasim would call “an item of high news value”, according to their study of media coverage of a political personality in Malaysia (2009: 408). In terms of another useful mass media theory, that of McComb and Shaw’s *Agenda-setting Theory* (1977), the high frequency and large scale of Malema-related information featuring in national printed press, radio and television in April 2011, was *setting* what should be seen at the time as central in national affairs. This is not to suggest that ‘audiences’ were being passively subjected to such a *setting* and that Malema was not what South Africans wanted to see, hear and read about. One of my UCT key-informants, Silvia, admitted that she did not follow the country’s politics until Malema entered the scene: “It piqued my interest because he was so sensationalist”.

Trevor Noah, an emergent talent in South African comedy at the time and popular for his humorous satires of racial issues in South African society, captured the generalized Malema-focused attitude in one of his first recorded shows following Caster Semenya’s episode:

“It has gotten to the point where it is not an event until Julius Malema pops up”, and in one impersonation, “Yes, yes, I know all that but what did Julius say?” (*The Daywalker*, 2009).

The media was not unaware of its own spotlight on Malema. In the *Cape Times*’ April 12 issue, the regular comic strip on the first page – “The Crack of Dawn” – read:

“High temperature, nausea, rocketing blood pressure...You’re suffering from a bad attack of Malemitis. Cut out newspapers, radio and TV”.

The media’s spotlight was also discussed online:

“I believe too much attention is being paid to the likes of Malema” said Temba [pseudonym] “I’ve always wondered what the situation will be if the press should decide not to publish every extremist views and outbursts”.

Graham Lashbrooke, from Kenilworth also wrote in the *Cape Times*:

“It is natural ‘in a news sense’ to focus on people like Malema and TB” (April 8<sup>th</sup> 2010).

Even Julius Malema publicly pointed to this “obsession” on several occasions, for example at the notorious press conference on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April:

*You [the media] know you are obsessed with wrong, sensational reporting [...] You have become obsessed with an individual and as a result you have lost your minds [...] you are misleading the South African population (Cape Times, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010)*

Was Malema the victim of sensationalist reporting or of a business-oriented media, whose main aims have become, in the ‘new South Africa’ to increase reading, listening and viewing numbers, which, among several other avenues, meant focusing on news items deemed controversial?

Many scholars who have researched the traditional mass media in South Africa have argued that, with the end of Apartheid, South African media was expected to serve an important role in facilitating the reconciliatory transformation and nation-building in the ‘new South Africa’. However, these scholars have argued that in recent years, the mass media in South Africa have become more consumerism-oriented (Kruger, 1999; Barnett, 1999; Berger, 2004; Orgeret, 2004; Masenyama, 2006; Salo, 2006). As the source of their revenue has become increasingly linked to businesses-advertising, the primary goals South African traditional mass media have become to increase audience numbers rather than to facilitate change and reconciliation. Among the ways that increased audience and consumer base can be achieved, is that of focusing on sensationalist and/or controversial news – high value news – which is a common media practice world-wide.

In recent times, claims had been made by the ANC that media professionals and institutions were being sensationalist and careless about facts accuracy and privacy issues in their reporting. Consequently, the ruling party had been tinkering with the proposal of a Media Appeals Tribunal – a statutory body - and with the approval of the Protection of Information Bill – a piece of legislation – in order to regulate the content of the media (Berger, 2010). The two proposals for media regulation were still in debate in mid-2011. Outraged responses from the media industry and the public were along the lines that such proposed regulations were not in accordance with the rights to freedom of speech, access to information, and an independent media, some of the media rights safe-guarded by the South African constitution. And there were concerns with such regulations turning into State-censoring measures reminiscent of the Apartheid era (SouthAfrica.info, 2006; Berger, 2010).

The sensationalist media issue was also raised after the Malema-Fisher confrontation on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April. As Malema made accusations directed at media institutions and professionals in general, it was interesting to note that the colleagues of the journalist who left the studio after this confrontation did not accompany him in exiting the venue. The absence of an expected solidarity gesture on the part of fellow journalists was widely criticized by other (non-present) media professionals, such as the South African National Editors' Forum, and by the wider public (*Cape Times*, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010).

Whether they were seen as scandal-hungry or just professionals doing their job, the point is that this "item of high news value" (Tiung & Hasim, 2009: 408) – Malema and his "controversial" statements and behaviour - came to occupy a highly central space in conversations among South Africans. It also came to occupy a central place in conversations *about* South Africa, on whom the international gaze was significant at the time in the context of the proximity of the World Cup (Smith, 2010).

In the discussions I observed and read about some defended Malema in his raising of issues that needed to be raised, seeing him as protecting the interests of a large sector of the South African population – the poor and disaffected black population.

Silvia, whom I mentioned earlier, a 30 year old PhD chemistry student at UCT and a Coloured residing in Cape Town, stated:

"He [Malema] is voicing what people are feeling. And that [what people are feeling] is still put under the carpet."

Others thought Malema was taking advantage of the media's drive to sell by being deliberately controversial in order to draw attention to himself:

Simon, another of the UCT students, expressed this attention-getting strategy of Malema's: "A lot of Malema is just for show. I think he is one of the best actors ever. He moulds it and he plays it. When he's on camera and there are reporters around him it's all a big show."

Simon, a white 30 year old UCT PhD chemistry student, Silvia's colleague for four years, "believed" that Malema, rather than being a victim, was taking advantage of the media to attract and maintain his popularity in the current national context and to increase his political power base. All he needed to do was to stick to his controversial way of raising sensitive issues in South Africa race and racism in particular:



“He is not bad really. He is being a politician [...] politically it’s powerful, it brings in a certain group of voters”.

Temba, following his earlier comment on Facebook on the media’s attention being focused on “the likes of Malema”, echoed Simon’s statement:

“A masquerade will only dance when he knows he’s being watched [sic]”.

Lisa, a contributor to the same Facebook discussion as Temba, agreed with him: “I think you have an excellent point in the media giving Malema his stage: if they ignored him, he will wither and fade”.

This perception on the part of these discussants on Malema’s strategy is corroborated by Tiung and Hasim who pointed out: “if political actors want to gain a place in the media, they should stick to certain conventions and genre which are needed by the media organizations to give priority to conflicts, power struggles and dramas” (2009: 408). This view is also supported by *ZA News*, a popular South Africa satirical puppet show only available online as it was never permitted to air on national television. In a *ZA News* episode on the 2011 local elections there was a send-up television commercial which satirized the April 2010 media frenzy:

*Is your career going nowhere? Are you fading out of the public eye? You need Afriforum<sup>26</sup>. It’s so simple. We accuse you of hate speech and ‘bang!’ You are an instant martyr, with all the publicity you could ever want. We did it for Julius and now we can do it for you (ZA News, 2011).*

Whether he was seen as a victim or as a strategist, of greater concern than with his agenda was the concern with the actual consequences of Malema’s statements for South African society. What could Malema’s statements on sensitive issues, such as race and inequality, often directed in an offensive and provocative manner towards white South Africans and regularly broadcast nation-wide through the media, lead to among citizens dissatisfied with their current and unchanging socio-economic and political situation? Discourses of *effectiveness* in audiences, in Halloran’s terms (1964), were widespread in the opinions and discussions I examined.

## MORAL PANICS AND THE FOLK DEVIL

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<sup>26</sup> One of the organizations who accused Malema of hate-speech for singing the “Shoot the Boer” song, and took the case to the National High Court (Archival Platform, 2011).

When Lisa, one of the Facebook discussants, affirmed that Malema would “wither and fade” if the media stopped paying attention to him, Temba responded to the implications in terms of the role of the media in the Malema controversy: “Lisa thanks for hitting the nail on the head. The media has not actually helped the situation in the country”.

“The situation” Temba was referring to was that of a perceived heightened racial polarization in the wake of the AWB’s leader murder. References to this situation were widespread in the news. Reports on the events surrounding this were commonly illustrated with such descriptions as that of the scenario outside the Ventersdorp Magistrate’s Court, where Terre’Blanche’s murder-suspects were on trial: Terre’Blanche’s supporter wearing khaki and military fatigues emblazoned with the AWB emblem, waving the old South African flag and singing the old anthem, whilst the black residents cheered for the suspects and called them heroes. “The black and white divide was evident after the court appearance” (*Cape Times*, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2010).

Some of the opinions on this situation which appeared in the *Cape Times* included:

“Malema might have gotten an H for woodwork but he would have gotten a distinction for his ability to rouse up the masses with rhetorical hate speech” (Dr. Rapiti from Mitchells Plain, *Cape Times*, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010)

On Facebook, John, a discussant in a different group from Temba’s and Lisa’s, exposed his concern in blunter terms:

“Malema is currently brainwashing the black youth of South Africa to hate white people”.

Other Facebook comments included:

“Unfortunately, there is going to be people dying because of people like Malema and his views.”

“The man is dangerous and should be stopped!”

Even Simon, one of my UCT key-informants, who had previously dismissed Malema as being “just for show”, admitted that “playing the racism card does stir heavy emotions in this country”. This was after Silvia had pointed out to him:

“You’re not in the black circles. I know what they discuss...people are still bitter and angry. Malema is bitter and angry and he is voicing that”.

However Lisa later agreed that perhaps Malema also had a personal agenda:

“He [Malema] is saying what people are feeling, but instead of being clever and forgiving and trying to reconcile, he is using it as a political thing to uplift him. He feels it; but he is also playing that”.

Concerns with the immediate and direct effects of Malema’s statements and actions were widespread across traditional and social media as well as in offline and online conversations among South Africans. What if these statements and actions were *effective* in Halloran’s sense of the word? What if, instead of a mere wage dispute, the two black workers who had murdered Terre’Blanche had indeed been inflamed and motivated by Malema’s singing of the “Shoot the Boer” song? What if the majority of the population still living in impoverished conditions were to follow their example? Malema, through the media, was seen as the main factor driving disaffected South Africans to commit racially motivated acts of violence.

Comments such as the following demonstrated the expectation of destructive consequences of the “tense situation in the country”:

“South Africa could be sitting on an explosive keg which threatens to blow up the hard work by our struggle heroes, with the past 16 years going up in flames”, Mark Kleinshchmidt from Kenwyn, Cape Town (*Cape Times*, April 8<sup>th</sup> 2010).

Besides the racial polarization in the country that Malema was allegedly intensifying, South Africa was seen to be “on the brink of” something, an expression that in the *Cape Times* April 8<sup>th</sup> 2010 issue alone featured three times in the opinions-section<sup>27</sup>.

In April 2010, South Africa was seen as on the brink of a “Race War”. Malema’s public singing of the “Shoot the Boer” song, which was granted the spotlight across the media nation-wide, was seen to have effectively motivated the murder by his two black workers of the white extremist group leader. Subsequently, white residents were marching in protest of the murder whilst the suspects were being called heroes by black residents in Ventersdorp. On national television, the white AWB Secretary-General clashed verbally with the black political commentator and came near to a physical clash with the black host of the show. Last, but not least, Malema had called a journalist a “white agent” in a press conference. With descriptions such as these, the environment was characterized as

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<sup>27</sup> It was the issue that followed the news on the Ventersdorp events, where images and descriptions of racial polarization had been emphasized.

“brittle”, “tense”, “explosive”, to name a few of the adjectives pervasive in all the discourses of all three of my sources: UCT students, the *Cape Times* and Facebook.

However April 2010 was not the first time a Race War was mentioned. Liz Cohan, from Constantia remembered a previous occasion when a race or civil war had been expected:

“We were on the brink when Chris Hani<sup>28</sup> was senselessly murdered, but a forgiving people, good sense and leadership prevailed” (*Cape Times*, April 8<sup>th</sup> 2010).

The event took place in April 1993, exactly seventeen years earlier, in a tense context. Masenyama confirms that “conditions prevailing before and after the 1994 elections, where political violence fanned along ethnic lines was the order of the day, resulted in a great deal of uncertainty and fear of a civil war” (2005: n.p.). But a full-blown civil war along racial lines never took place.

Between 1993 and 2010 the Race War anxiety had been revitalized on many other occasions. I shall provide the example of two of them. The first was when charismatic leader Nelson Mandela ended his mandate in 1999 (*Behind the Rainbow*, 2008). The second was when a cloud of controversy surrounded Zuma’s presidential elections in 2008-2009, that I witnessed as I had already been living in Cape Town since 2004. Anxiety about racial divisions and conflict is even talked about with reference to the future: what will happen when Nelson Mandela dies, when his existence and influence although now merely symbolic, is perceived to some extent as maintaining order in the country.

In April 2010 Julius Malema and his statements considered hate speech were seen by many as leading the country into a Race War.

What all these occasions have in common is that they are perceived by some South African nationals as being occasions of crisis in the country. As I introduced in Chapter 1, theorization around intermittent constant re-emergence of particular anxieties in societies in times of crisis was pioneered by Stanley Cohen (1972), who established the theory around “moral panics” and “folk devils”. To recapitulate Cohen’s theory: the theory sees ‘moral panics’ as instances when an ever-present moral anxiety particular to a society becomes

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<sup>28</sup> Commander of the military wing of the ANC and leader of the Communist Party, who was murdered by an Afrikaans group in 1993, when the NP and the ANC were still negotiating the democracy of the country (*Behind the Rainbow*, 2008).

more pronounced or is *made* more pronounced. Factors that incite such moments can include “a condition, episode, person or group of persons” (Hall, 1974 cited in Procter, 2004). Cohen called these the “folk devils”. Folk devils are the menaces to societal order, values and interests. According to Cohen’s theory, in the context of British media and society folk devils are constructed and thus moral panics are instigated and revitalized in order to mobilize the majorities in society whose role it is to ensure that the anxieties underlying the moral panics do not come into being. The media plays a main role in this construction. Dowson *et al*, who also used Cohen’s theory in their study, explain this process:

*The classic construction of the moral panic (Cohen 1972), was thus underpinned by a politics of anxiety theory. This approach understands a panic as serving to reassert the dominance of an established value system, particularly at a time of perceived anxiety and crisis. In this way, the folk devil provides a necessary external threat which the majority can rally against*<sup>29</sup>.

In the case of South Africa I do not want to suggest a folk devil has been constructed and a moral panic revived by the media at particular points in time *with the purpose* of reasserting order in South African society. In order to do this, this study would need to focus on media institutions per se in order to explore such a hypothesis.

Nonetheless, I will still make use of Cohen’s concepts of moral panics and folk devils to explain anxieties such as that of fear of an imminent Race War, and other associated anxieties that gain prominence in South African discourses at times of perceived crisis.

The link between moral panics and deep-seated anxieties in society is noted by Dowson *et al*: “The moral panic is centred upon political issues that have at their core a strong moral dimension conducive to heated debate around acceptable behaviour within society” (2004: 6).

In South Africa, the “acceptable behaviour” of society has since the early nineties been driven by visions of reconciliation, transformation and nation-building among all South African nationals. However, despite the transformation rhetoric and efforts, socio-economic

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<sup>29</sup> It would be interesting to analyse the context of the recent UK riots that took place in August 2011 in light of Cohen’s theory, and the anxieties that have been emerging around the revolutionary possibilities of social media against governments that I describe in Chapter 1.

and political inequalities remain a reality in post-Apartheid South Africa, and have continued to run along racial lines (Salo, 2006; Kersting, 2007). The economic circumstances of many non-whites have not improved, or such improvement has been slow. Aside from the rapid emergence of an affluent black élite, at times pejoratively associated with political nepotism and corrupted BEE policies, a large part of the economic sector, businesses and resources, remain under the control of white South Africans. In addition, in the year 2010, protests were taking place country-wide, from public service and private company employees demanding better wages, to township residents demanding service delivery. Against this, very succinctly explained, background of inequality and widespread dissatisfaction, the April 2010 series of events, centred to a large extent on the issue of race, revitalized the moral panic of a Race War.

In April 2010 Malema became the folk devil. In fact, as described earlier, Malema could be said to have become the folk devil already in 2009, and has remained so to the present (2011). Nonetheless his framing as “*l’enfant terrible*”, the “Juju baby” who was merely causing trouble to get some media attention, to seduce a group of voters and to advance in his political career but with serious *effective* consequences in South African society, was the one that dominated the media sphere in 2010.

In the case of the news reports in the *Cape Times*, this framing was ‘constructed through quoting such relatively authoritative organisations as the agricultural union TAU:

“Racial polarization is a reality and the trigger for further conflict lies in the hands of the ANCYL and its radical leader, Julius Malema” (*Cape Times*, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2010).

TAU was an organization which suggested in the same issue that the murder of the AWB leader was political and speculated on the government’s involvement. Similar quotes, from statements made by the Afriforum chairman were included.

This journalistic ‘quoting approach’ was evident in most of the newspaper’s April issues, with the notable exception of the April 9<sup>th</sup> issue that reported on the Malema-Fisher’s press conference. In this issue the news articles carried descriptions of the incident written by the news writers, descriptions such as:

“The ANC YL president *attacked* the media at a briefing yesterday, calling a BBC journalist a ‘bastard’ and an ‘agent’”.

“The *attack* was preceded by a general one on the media” (my emphasis).

In subsequent issues the news writers reverted to quoting public figures.

Even if by quoting those other than journalists in most cases, Malema's role in the media was characterized as effectively inciting racial polarization and a possible Race War. According to Cohen's "folk devils" theory, Malema's behaviour was framed as being harmful to societal order. In the context of this framing, most of his characterizations were presented as negative even if constructed indirectly i.e. by quoting people and institutions other than journalists and the media. As Malema himself put it: "Whatever I say is going to be a problem" (3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, 2009).

However, just as this was not first time the intensified panic of a Race War had emerged in South Africa, Malema was also not the pioneer folk devil source of this anxiety. Terre'Blanche, for example, was regarded as a threat to the democracy of the country on some occasions when he was alive. Mike Berger from Cape Town said this of Terre'Blanche:

"Not only was he racist but he was a violent, volatile and belligerent man who would have spelt disaster as a leader" (*Cape Times*, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010).

"Like a great demagogue, like Hitler, he [Terre'Blanche] knew his audience's weak spots, their fears and he knew how to play on these" (Jan Taljaard, *Cape Times*, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2010).

AWB's Secretary-General, Andre Visagie, also became for a brief moment a potential candidate for a folk devil after publicly avowing that Terre'Blanche's death should be avenged (*Cape Times*, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2010), and losing his temper on the *Africa 360* show. Characterizations in the news articles were along the lines of "The AWB might have its own misguided missile in the form of Visagie [...] The Malema of the AWB" (*Cape Times*, April 8<sup>th</sup> 2010). But in Visagie's case the spotlight was short-lived as he was curbed from making further controversial statements by the AWB's newly appointed leader (*Cape Times*, April 12<sup>th</sup> 2010).

Peter Mokaba, a former leader of the ANCYL, had also been characterized as a menace when he was in power, and references to the episode of his singing of the "Shoot the Boer" song in public back in 1997 were frequent throughout the *Cape Times* opinions articles and the Facebook discussions I analysed. However, unlike the case of Malema, Mokaba had been swiftly reprimanded by the then President Nelson Mandela at the time, as noticed by those discussants who would bring this episode up.

This reference to President Mandela's leadership in contrast to the current leadership of the country, often described in the opinions and discussions I observed as

“weak”, recalls another anxiety that was emerging in April 2010, and has recurrently emerged at times of perceived crisis: the anxiety around envisioning the future South Africa as a Zimbabwe II.

### MANDELA’S ‘RAINBOW NATION’ VS ZIMBABWE II

The future of South Africa was often discussed with reference to “the tense situation” being lived in the country in April 2010. In addition to the concern that inequality in the country was still very much widespread 16 years after the end of Apartheid. With regards to the future, a Race War was one possibility. Another possibility was the forced redistribution of wealth. This redistribution was mainly spoken of as a redistribution of the wealth of white South Africans amongst black South Africans, since the former were perceived as continuing to be the primary controllers of economic power in 2010. These discourses were prevalent in the opinions and discussions I analysed from the three sources, and included a comparison of the South African future scenario to the situation in Zimbabwe, where the land seizure program implemented by President Mugabe and his party in 2000 had turned into a violent reallocation of formerly white-owned farms to state officials and others politically-connected to ZANU-PF (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

Lisa, conscious that inequality continued to run along racial lines in the year 2010, said:

“But redistribution takes a long time.”

To which Nandi, a black South African from Johannesburg, studying for an undergraduate Business Science degree at UCT, replied:

“It could be quicker. But then you end up like Zimbabwe”.

The possibility of a future South Africa as a “Zimbabwe II”, or “another Zimbabwe”, in my experience, has been prevalent in discourses about South Africa every time a crisis has erupted in the country. However Malema’s public declaration of his support for Mugabe and ZANU-PF at the beginning of April 2010 during his visit to Zimbabwe, where he again sang the “Shoot the Boer” song (Archival Platform, 2010), has brought the possibility of this scenario closer, in some South Africans’ anxieties. This incident, together with the ANCYL leader’s frequent public statements on the need for a plan to nationalize the mostly white privately owned mines in the country (SouthAfrica.com, 2006), the anxiety around a forced



redistribution of wealth has been discussed ever more frequently. Lee on Facebook described Malema as “a Robert Mugabe apprentice at work [...] a tyrant at work” after he expressed his support for Zimbabwe’s president at the beginning of April 2010.

The responsibility of such anxieties becoming a reality or not, has often been placed on the shoulders of the country’s leadership: “the government”, “the ANC”, and “Zuma” – terms used together or interchangeably in the opinions and discussions I observed. In addition to future scenarios which would spell disaster for South Africa’s economy, the leadership of the country has been seen as carrying responsibility for the continued inequality lived in South Africa, and more specifically, the instability of the situation generated by the events of April 2010. In the opinions and discussions, and in the news reports (through the ‘quoting approach’), “the government”, the “ANC”, and “President Zuma”, were prominently characterized by words such as “corruption”, “nepotism”, “incompetence”, “ineffectiveness”, and “weak leadership”. When Malema was mentioned in the context of governance the last description was the most used: the government, the ANC, and Zuma had all shown weakness in curbing Julius Malema<sup>30</sup>:

“There is no one at the ANC that seems to be able to tame the young man” (*Cape Times*, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010), wrote Rapiti from Mitchells Plain. Rapiti also brought up Hitler in comparison to the political power the ANCYL leader was allegedly enjoying, a comparison which had been made by Jan Taljaard, in the April 6<sup>th</sup> 2010 issue in relation to Terre’Blanche, a folk devil from a previous time.

*Malema has become a Hitler in the making because the ANC has sprung into his defence, not because it agrees with him, but because it is clearly afraid of his power to topple the mighty with the support he enjoys among the youth [...] Malema has ANC in the palm of his hand* ( Rapiti, *Cape Times*, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010)

Lee, on Facebook, asked: “Why aren’t ANC doing anything to stop this guy [Malema] from inciting hatred and killings [sic]?”

Such “weakness”, or lack of action, on the part of the government, the ANC, and President Zuma in their handling of the “tense situation” perceived as having been

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<sup>30</sup> Zuma and the ANC only publically and directly condemned Malema in the second week of April, after all of the events had taken place. Malema then faced disciplinary charges by the ANC (Archival Platform, 2011).

generated by Malema's "inflammatory remarks", was in various instances compared to the way in which President Nelson Mandela had controlled the situation when Chris Hani was assassinated at the moment of the birth of the country's democracy, and the way in which he had moved swiftly to stop Peter Mokaba from singing the "Shoot the Boer" song in 1997. A strong and firm leadership was perceived as key to calming down animosities when they had emerged in the past. But in 2010 the leadership was perceived as "weak" and "ineffectual" and thus the worst scenarios were expected.

Inevitably the discourses blaming the current leadership for South Africa's unsatisfactory situation in 2010, as well as for the tense state of affairs in April, were largely exploited by opposition parties. The DA leader at the time, Helen Zille, was quoted in the April 7<sup>th</sup> *Cape Times* issue, emphasizing that Malema made President Zuma "look like a follower rather than a leader". In the next issue - April 8<sup>th</sup> 2010 - she wrote an article for the 'Insight' section of the newspaper, in which she described the "the ANC Youth League's sinister leader, Julius Malema" reviving a song that "threatened the shared future" of the nation. At this point she also reminded readers of Mandela's exemplary leadership at what she called "an even more challenging historical moment" for the ANC: that of the murder of Chris Hani.

These sentiments contrasting the current leadership with Nelson Mandela's leadership also appeared alongside nostalgic memories of the period right after the end of Apartheid and the birth of a democratic South Africa.

Simon, one of my UCT key-informants, who had studied in an all-Afrikaans school, recounted his first experience in a multiracial school:

"The funny thing is integration was easier back in time because we all knew it was a big deal and wanted to try hard to make it work".

Lindsay Ross from Newlands wrote in the *Cape Times*:

"Sixteen years ago whites and blacks came together to vote, singing the actual national anthem – we saw ourselves marching into a bright future as one rainbow nation" (*Cape Times*, April 8<sup>th</sup> 2010).

"The transition period" directly after the 1994 elections was often remembered as one when South Africans were making an effort to reconcile and transform into a united South African nation. Such effort was largely seen as driven by a charismatic Nelson Mandela under the rhetoric of "The Rainbow Nation". In the conversations I witnessed on

Facebook, Mandela was often viewed as the main reason why “South Africa did not explode into civil war” at the time. Although “he wasn’t able to redress past injustices”, as in transforming South Africa into a more equal society economically, socially, and politically across racial lines, his characterization in discussions among South Africans was always expressed in a positive tone – he was a sort of “folk angel” in contrast to Cohen’s concept of folk devil. After Mandela retired from government, the government sometimes used him as a symbolic icon to refuel nation-building attempts. For example, the South African Parliament’s theme in 2010 was: “Celebrate the legacy of Mandela – contribute to nation-building” (Parliament, 2010). In light of this folk angel characterization, his inevitable death and physical disappearance was also a motif for great anxiety in the discussions, as I mentioned earlier: the disappearance of the icon of reconciliation in South Africa who, was perceived to continue to maintain order in the country, even if only symbolically.

Simon continued his recalling of “the transition period”: “Ironically by the time I left school, in my matric year, the amount of racism climbed through the roof in that period. Everybody made an effort at first but when the transition period was over, everybody reverted back”.

The rest of Lindsay’s contribution went along similar lines, but regarding the 2010 situation:

*Now in Ventersdorp we witness the sad spectacle of blacks on one side refusing to stop singing the kill the boer song and the whites singing Die Stem, waving the old flag and saying they will revive the K-word. And the leaders? We no longer look to them for any kind of leadership at all.*

While some were asking for President Mandela: “Madiba – we need you to speak out now” (David Lowe, from Sea Point, *Cape Times*, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010), others were requesting the current leadership to take a stand: “don’t let a little boy teach you [Zuma] your job [...] show him who’s in charge” (Rapiti from Mitchells Plain, *Cape Times*, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010).

Dr Rapiti from Mitchell’s Plain described further the contrast of “Mandela’s and Tutu’s reconciliatory attitude and amazing abilities to forgive [which] have helped this country to channel its energies to unite under one banner and reconstruct the damage done through centuries of apartheid rule” with the disappointment of the present which was one, in April 2010, perceived to be of heightened racial polarization and “on the brink of a Race War” (*Cape Times*, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2010). The future of the country was often predicted as “no

different from any other post-colonial African country that has been run by ‘democratically elected’ merciless Mugabe-style despots who have ruined their countries for their personal gain” (Rapiti, *Cape Times*, April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010).

As theories around the eminent possibilities for the country of a Race War and a Zimbabwe II proliferated a , another theme was also pervasive in the kinds of discussions tied to the moral panics: that of *leaving*.

## LEAVING SOUTH AFRICA

The main form that discourses around ‘leaving’ took was mainly expressed by white South Africans and mainly took the forms of fleeing or being “forced to leave” the country. Trevor Noah again, picks up on this discursive phenomenon in *The Daywalker* (2009):

*[...]A lot of people panic in South Africa, they panic, when it comes to our politicians [...] especially around election time, that’s when you see the most panic in South Africa. It’s always been the case, from our first democratic elections in 1994. Remember that? Nelson Mandela was about to become president. Most of the country was overjoyed; a few people were worried. You heard them whispering [and putting on an English white South African accent] “I’m leaving, I’m leaving. I’m going to Australia, Mary. I’m going. It’s been fun but it’s time to go, hey? Because now you know they are going to take over. It’s time to go. I’m leaving. I’m going to Australia” Then Nelson Mandela became president...and they all stayed. “He’s a wonderful man, wonderful man! Ah, if it wasn’t for him I would have left hey? Wonderful man! He’s amazing! Really great. I love him”. You thought they were over it but next elections people panicked again. Thabo Mbeki, about to become president, people lost it “I’m leaving. I’m going to Australia, Mary. I’m going. This time I’m going. You know now that Mandela is gone they are going to eat us hey? It’s only a matter of time [...]” But once again, Thabo became president and they all stayed [...] then we had Kgalema Motlanthe. Wasn’t that crazy? Kgalema Motlanthe. He was like our interim president, didn’t want to touch anything, he was that guy. No one knew what to get of him. This was crazy; people lost their minds even worse “I CAN’T BELIEVE IT! I DIDN’T EVEN VOTE! I DIDN’T EVEN VOTE! WHAT THE HELL? One minute I go to bed and Thabo Mbeki is our president and then next thing you know I wake up and we have Kga...Mmm...[not being able to pronounce it] I can’t believe it! I am going to*

*Australia, I am going". But then once again thankfully they stayed. And then it got interesting. Because then it was the turn of Jacob Zuma. Woooh! The original bogeyman. People panicked again; although it was different. For the first time in South African history you had black people going "Eish. How much is that ticket to Australia again?"*

This comedy-sketch illustrates not only the discourse of leaving, which I will be exploring in a moment, but the recurrence of the moral panics in South African society I have already outlined. As recounted at the beginning of the present chapter, Zuma at one point was also in the media spotlight and one could say had been constructed by some groups in South African society as a folk devil. He was a candidate for the presidency facing corruption and rape charges as well as having dubious education credentials. These episodes stains on his record, together with his statements around HIV/ AIDS during his rape trial gave some people cause to predict that he would certainly upset the order of South African society once he became the country's leader. However, Zuma's characterization of corruption and ignorance in the media shifted after he won the elections to discourses of ineffective governance regarding the overall situation of the country in 2010. And to discourses of weak leadership when it came to Malema and his statements and conduct during April 2010.

To return to the theme of leaving, Noah's comedy-sketch illustrates discourses among white South Africans that are repeatedly revitalized in times of perceived crisis. These moral panics take the form of perceptions on the part of white South Africans that they are under threat and should therefore *leave* the country.

John, who had said on Facebook that Malema was brainwashing the black youth of South Africa, added to his point at a later stage of the discussion:

"They want to take what whites own for themselves and force us to leave the country".

He was referring to the ANC who, in his opinion, was using Malema as a strategy to ensure continuous support from the majority of South Africans, since they [the ANC] could no longer "keep on making empty promises of service delivery".

"The best thing whites can do is to make as much of a plan as possible to get out of here. The white man is no longer welcome in Africa", Lance suggested in a different Facebook discussion.

James Cunningham from Camps Bay in an opinion article to the *Cape Times*, in the context of the moral panics and the 'need to leave' anxiety he saw this anxiety as an Apartheid legacy of white fear deeply internalised in the "white psyche":

*Basic white fear, which goes back almost to 1652, is that black workers, then slaves, will rise up and murder their employers. This fear flourished under apartheid and is still entrenched in the white psyche today and TB's murder only re-enforced it: 'if it happened to him, it can happen to any of us' kind of thinking. (Cape Times, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2010).*

Marais refers to it as "*swaart gevaar*" or "black peril", which he describes as a fear of blacks by white South Africans, a legacy of the Apartheid regime, which constantly exploited the rhetoric of the white minority being at the peril of the non-white majority in order to galvanize support among whites. A fear that Terre'Blanche was renowned for knowing how to use in order to gather support for the AWB in times of crisis, according to Jan Taljaard, when he compared Terre'Blanche to Hitler earlier (Cape Times, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2010).

The fear reference was prevalent in the discourses I witnessed among white South Africans on Facebook. Andrew, who was in the same discussion group as Temba, Lisa, and John, described this fear:

"Malema and his revolutionary speeches scares me [...] What scares me is the absolute expression of hatred against white South Africans without exception amongst the Malema followers".

Steve added his expression of fear to this anxiety in the same discussion:

"Know this. Like Zimbabwe. The world will just stand and watch it all repeat itself again. NO ONE is coming to rescue SA, least of all rescue the whites in SA. They are all expendable".

Deviating slightly from this theme, I began to note the unfriendly tone that discussions on Facebook on the theme of leaving acquired at times. Arguments would often develop between those who thought that there was no other solution but to leave in the face of an imminent Race War, while others argued defensively that the country had come a long way since the heydays of Apartheid and idea of the alleged Race War was only entertained by minorities on the fringes of society. Insults were frequent from both sides, with the former group accusing the others of being naïve and not knowing "what it's like to have family murdered, raped and robbed", and the latter group, accusing the former group

of still carrying the “baggage mentality” of their parents and forefathers. There were some discussants too that would agree whites should leave South Africa, because they “did not belong”, but these were few in the discussion groups I analysed.

Moreover, and this not only regarding the theme of *leaving* but also previous themes, South Africans already outside the country who were contributing to the Facebook discussions were often not accorded the legitimacy to write about affairs taking place in South Africa at the time by the other discussants still living in the country. These “emigrant” discussants would be told that their not having “lived in the country for long” or their “sitting on the other side of the fence”, disqualified them from being able to claim any knowledge of what they were ‘talking’ about. This criticism applied not only to white South Africans, but to all South Africans living outside of the country.

Other questions of legitimacy emerged in relation to what was referred to as “education”. If posts had typos or mistakes in the formation of sentences, disagreements would often venture into arguments as to whether the person on the other end of the conversation was “educated enough” to be able to comment meaningfully on the issues being debated. At this point the arguments would often become focused on the places where discussants had obtained their education or on a competition involving pretentious literary jargon, or quotes from public figures as well as from studies about the country from ‘legitimate researchers and sources’ to endorse the opinions of discussants.

Issues of legitimacy were also present in discussions – often of a conflictual nature - between South Africans of different generations. In the *Cape Times* opinions pieces and in Facebook discussions, statements were often made that the younger generation did not have the legitimate authority to comment on apartheid meaningfully because “they were not present at the time”, or “were too young to remember”. Therefore they had not acquired enough maturity to be able to recognize and critically analyse the “baggage-mentality” in present attitudes and behaviour that they claimed were being conveyed to them on a daily basis through their parents, their friends and the media, and more importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, through influential public figures such as Malema who was also considered by the older generation as being “too young to know what he is talking about”.

This questioning of the legitimacy and knowledgeability of discussants contributing to Facebook, an open ‘public space’, recalls O’Neil’s reflection on the “stateless system” of

the Internet, in which he argues that “authority runs rife” (2009: 2). Those not living in South Africa, the “non-educated” and the “too young”, were some of the examples of discussants who were accorded less authority by other discussants in particular discussions. Nonetheless, this lack of authority did not mean not being able to contribute to discussions. Whether contributions of some South Africans were considered to be legitimate or not by other South Africans in a Facebook discussion, did not result in exclusion from the discussions. In most cases these discussants continued to contribute to and to be involved in the discussions. Thus, they continued to be part of the process of nation-negotiation in the more democratic space of the Internet. This was also the case when arguments deteriorated into an exchange of insults and offensive statements. In line with Hine’s (2000) space-distanciation factor of interaction in the public space of the Internet, discussions were not able to evolve into physical aggression, as in what almost happened in the case the Visagie-Pheko-Maroleng quarrel on the *Africa 360* show. Therefore discussants, in the democratic domain of the Internet, would continue to contribute to the discussions that would, in most cases, eventually return to more polite discussions about the topic of the discussion group. This illustrates the sense in which the Internet can be seen as ‘democratic’ and shows that, as O’Neil would describe it, a “grassroots democratic” regulation was in place” (O’Neil, 2009: 2).

To return to the topic of leaving, the perception of whites feeling under threat was not restricted to conversations among white South Africans. Lusu from Gugulethu, who self-identified as a supporter of the ANC, wrote:

“South Africa is for all who live in it [quoting President Mandela when he was released from jail]. White people must not feel threatened, especially by the ANC. We are known as a democratic nation worldwide” (*Cape Times*, April 12<sup>th</sup> 2010).

The discourse of leaving was also not confined to white South Africans having to flee the country. Another prominent form of the leaving discourse was that of I “the likes of Malema” needing to leave South Africa in order to eliminate racism and improve the situation in the country. In the Facebook discussion, where Temba, Lisa, John, Andrew, and Steve were active discussants, the discussion was initiated by a white South African male using offensive terms stating that the majority of South Africa was uneducated, poor, black people who all supported Malema. A white South African woman responded:



“I shall drop you at the airport. Get out - we don't need black Malemas and we don't need white Malemas. Get out of here!”

In another Facebook discussion, where the argument had also become crude, suggestions were made in terms of having “racists leave the country”. These suggestions were that all racists be put into boats and sent with no address to waters infested with sharks.

So far I have described and illustrated some of the discourses that emerged from my sources, discourses around anxieties in line with perceptions of Malema and his statements as being effective and leading the country into a Race War, or turning it into Zimbabwe II, or forcing white South Africans to leave. Nonetheless, although these discourses were prominent across traditional and new media, online and offline, discussions beyond such understandings of effectiveness were also prominent, as I shall demonstrate in the following sub-section.

#### ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE

During times of crisis there are certain anxieties in South African society that are revitalized, mainly those around a Race War or a Zimbabwe II, and there are always folk devils that accompany such crises, and these figures are perceived as being able to effectively transform these anxieties into reality. I have argued that this was the case of Julius Malema in April 2010. These perceptions of *effectiveness* were recurrent and widespread in my data.

However, there were also many instances where South Africans looked beyond these understandings of an all-powerful, direct, immediate effectiveness, and would discuss other factors and influences at work in the South African lived context in the year 2010.

For example, in the 6<sup>th</sup> of April issue of the *Cape Times* 2010, the editorial piece offered the following analysis:

*[...] We should not elevate the Julius Malemas and other tawdry populists into something they are not by ascribing to them the power to turn people into killers. Nor should we see Malema and Terre'Blanche as the two sides of the same coin. The ANCYL leader may not be the poster boy for the youth and future of this country, but neither is he an armed and dangerous racist, bent on the overthrow of the state.*

*Making Malema into a bogeyman is a convenient way to avoid the difficult question: why exactly is it that this rather unimpressive political leader can garner the support he clearly enjoys in some places? Is it perhaps that he offers an outlet for some of the frustration and disappointment of those who feel left out of the celebrated political 'miracle' to which TB was so hostile? Whatever one may think of Malema, the question demands attention.*

At times, some discussants would see it as more fitting to focus on the cracks in the current lived situation in South Africa, and would choose not to ignore "the nexus of mediating factors and influences" (Halloran, 1964), in contrast to other instances in which they were which was being done by others who were homogenizing both media, as a tool for those in power with political agendas, and audiences as passive receptors of information that leads them to immediately, directly and effectively "Shoot the Boer". Rather than falling into the bandwagon of moral panics and folk devils on which the media spotlight was being trained in 2010, as reiterated by Simon (UCT), and Temba and Lisa (on Facebook) earlier in this chapter, some Facebook discussants suggested that what was going on in the country was more of a "class struggle" and one that was being papered over by discourses of racism, by the media, politicians, and citizens in combination.

Eusebius McKaiser, a South African political analyst pointed to the realities of the continuing racial divide and to more positive solutions:

*The Rainbow Nation motif in the 1990s gave us the illusion that we have a cohesive national identity, but the truth of the matter is those differences haven't gone away and they're not going to go away until we are comfortable to have a dialogue about diversity, pluralism and what these things mean. (3rd Degree, 2010b).*

This thesis has attempted to show, even if amongst only a small fraction of the population of South Africa, this kind of dialogue was happening in April 2010. Despite the anxieties connected to racial polarization, conviviality and non-hostile communication across racial categories was considerably more frequent and widespread, than such anxieties and moral panics, fuelled by the mass media, would have people believe.

Regarding my key-informants from UCT, Silvia was a coloured South African who had married a white South African and was doing the same PhD degree as Simon. They had been working together for almost 3 years and had become good friends along the way. Lisa once remarked:

*Something that I didn't know about and that I had to learn from my husband was that white people have this shame that they feel because of Apartheid, because they sort of feel like they lived and enjoyed it and didn't do anything about it. I didn't know that...and it was so interesting for me to realize that.*

Tina, a white Afrikaans girl from Cape Town had been friends with Nandi, a black Xhosa girl from Johannesburg ever since 2008 when she had joined the women soccer team at UCT. A team which I was part of for 6 years, from 2004 till 2010, and during that time it never had less than a representation of 5 different nationalities, and including all South African racial categorizations.

At the end of one of our conversations I together – Simon, Lisa, Nandi, and Tina – Simon mentioned:

*I remember this girl Mpo. We did vac training in Johannesburg, and this black girl, was very racist but like openly so and she would be ranting like "Look at this white people how they..." And we actually became friends and I was like "hello Mpo, what colour am I?" And she said "You're not white, you're colourless".*

Tina's response to this was:

*But that's what I am getting at! You don't even see the person's skin colour if you get on along with them. Because you [referring to Nandi] can be ranting and raging about white people as if I was black. I love that. She doesn't even see that I am white because she is so comfortable and used to me that it actually doesn't equate in her mind that I am also white.*

And Nandi continued:

*I think I do that all the time. I complain about white people all the time. Their blonde hair and their shiny teeth. Godamn it! And then I complain about black people as well. Like 'oh look at them going again!'*

Laughing, Nandi stopped suddenly, and added "Oh man! We always forget the Indians...".

In one of the Facebook discussions where the argument around the possibility of a Race War had become heated, Lindsay re-directed the course of the conversation towards a more positive outlook of the future:

*I was too young to understand what was happening before '94. I study with people from every race, I get lectured by people from every race and I have friends from*

*many different races and cultures. I like that and wouldn't want to live any other way.*

Going back to Wasserman (2011), I would argue that socio-economic and political inequality should never be denied or papered over. This inequality is still prominent in South African society. And racial segregation has remained to some extent in South Africans' explanatory models of the world, as Ross explains (2010: 13). Nonetheless, the visibility of this inequality when put under the spotlight by the media, especially in the course of discourses of racial polarization, should not conceal the conviviality and dialogue that is increasingly taking place across racial divides in post-Apartheid South Africa. A dialogue, which in April 2010 took place mainly around the same series of events and folk devil believed to be dividing the nation. The media spotlight on Julius Malema and the series of events in April 2010 were inciting discussion, but not necessarily shaping opinions according to the framing under which Malema and the events had been subjected to in traditional media. Hence the limitations of media *effectiveness*, well argued by Halloran. The multitude of opinions and positions observed in this study shows that discussants were indentifying with certain discourses and not others, at times interchangeably, going back and forward between opposing opinions and positions, demonstrating the process of making sense of individual, group and national identities, informed by the historical path of South Africa and set in the country's lived realities in the year 2010 – what I call a process of nation-negotiation.

## SUMMARY

The attention that South African audiences have paid to Julius Malema is to a certain extent influenced by the frequency of attention received by, and the depth and importance afforded to, the ANCYL leader by the traditional media.

There is a wide variety of opinions among South Africans across traditional and social media, online and offline. Themes that attribute *effectiveness* to Malema's statements in causing abrupt and negative changes are widespread: an imminent Race War, South Africa turning into a Zimbabwe II. These reflect the habitual moral anxieties or panics that exist among South Africans but which reach new heights in times of perceived crisis. Tied to these moral panics are the folk devils which change with each perceived crisis. In April 2010 South Africa was perceived by some South Africans, whose opinions and discussions I analysed, as

being “on the brink” of a Race War thanks to Julius Malema, the folk devil at the time, the kind of Race War which could have taken place back in 1994, but under Mandela’s charismatic reconciliatory leadership did not, which is a reconciliatory skill is often said to be lacking in the present leadership of the country. Another theme that appeared closely connected to the intermittent moral panics, especially among white South Africans, was that of leaving, or being forced to leave the country.

Nevertheless, despite the widespread anxieties of *effectiveness*, there were some South Africans who were also discussing the more complex nexus of mediating factors in South Africa 2010, factors such as issues of class, leadership, and the media’s drive to sell news that could also be contributing to the perception of a “tense situation” being lived in the country in April 2010. As my title suggests: in the opinions and discussions I analysed, South Africans were simultaneously papering and unpapering the cracks of South African society lived in the year 2010. Nation-negotiation was taking place among South Africans through a variety of forms of communication.

I had already discovered the nature and degree of complexity and heterogeneity of discourses among South Africans in the opinion-pieces in the *Cape Times* and among the conversations with UCT students. In the field of the Internet I was able to find resonance of the themes that had emerged offline. In response to Miller and Slater’s call for bringing research from virtual cyberspace into geographical social spaces (2000), I hope to have demonstrated the similarities between what was being said ‘online’ and ‘offline’ in the present study and to have found a research process in which the two complement each other.

In addition, regarding the democratic credentials of the Internet, particularly social media, discussed in Chapter 1, although in some of the discussions I read on Facebook authority ran rife (O’Neil, 2009: 2), as discussants raised questions of the legitimacy and knowledgeability of other discussants – emigrant South Africans, “non-educated” South Africans, and young South Africans – these questions did not impede the discussants to continue to contribute to the discussions and, therefore, to continue to participate in the process of nation-negotiation.

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# CONCLUSION

## (UN)PAPERING THE CRACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, the long awaited mega-event – the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™ - kicked-off in South Africa. In the ten stadiums across the nine provinces of the country 64 matches were held, and attendance was recorded at an average of 93% of the total capacity of the stadiums. A total of 309 554 foreign tourists arrived in South Africa , an increase of 25% in the total number of foreigners visiting the country compared to the same period in 2009<sup>31</sup> (Tshwarisano LFB, 2011).

From the 11<sup>th</sup> of June till the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2010, the country was filled with visitors from various parts of the world, and the stadiums, fan parks, shopping malls, restaurants, bars, spaza shops, bazaars, home, and streets, were filled with the sounds of the Vuvuzelas, Shakira and Freshly Ground's *Waka Waka*, K'Naan's *Waving Flag*, TKZee's *Shibobo*, and HHP and JR's *Make the Circle Bigger* , to name a few of the most played songs, and shouts of excitement - "Ayoba", "Ke Nako", and "It is here!" – all amounting to the "Vuvuzela-blowing *joie de vivre*" (Smith, 2010), one of the terms used to describe the general environment of excitement surrounding the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™ in June-July 2010 in South Africa.

Bafana Bafana, the South African team, did not emerge victorious. Nonetheless, South Africa was able to host a distinguished "world-class event" and a "continental showpiece", and ended the event with news reports by FIFA, with titles such as: "An emotional goodbye" (FIFA.com, 2010a), "A World Cup to Remember" (FIFA.com, 2010b), and "Mandela's Dream Realised" (FIFA.com, 2010c). International media praised South Africa's success in hosting the mega-event. Foreign visitors said they had radically changed their negative perceptions of the country, which had been based on pessimistic international news coverage before the event, to very positive perceptions, after attending

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<sup>31</sup> Important to note that around the same period in 2009 – from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of June - South Africa held the 2009 FIFA Confederations Cup™, in preparation for the 2010 FIFA World Cup™. The number of foreigners visiting the country then was already above the average.

the event. Among South Africans “success”, “pride”, and “unity” were some of the words used to describe the experience of hosting the World Cup (FIFA.com, 2010c<sup>32</sup>).

In 2010, the Race War that had been anticipated and widely discussed in the South African media in April 2010 did not take place and during the months of June and July discourses of a racial polarization led by Julius Malema subsided in the national media. In the *Cape Times* (July 13 2010), one opinion article by John Scott, commenting on returning to normal everyday life activities after the World Cup, read: “I can think of a few more normal activities, such as worrying about the economy again, and paying more attention to Julius Malema, who has been sadly neglected over the past four weeks”.

Scott was right. With the end of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, Malema re-gained the media spotlight and has since then, up to the present (September 2011) has repeatedly made the news: for continuing to make successive calls for the nationalization of the mining sector, for purging opponents in the ANCYL to his candidacy for ANCYL leader in the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2011 ANCYL elections, where he was re-elected, for stating on July 31<sup>st</sup> 2011 that the ANCYL would be working with opposition parties in Botswana to overthrow the current party in power, the Botswana Democratic Party; for facing disciplinary charges by the ANC party, for the second time and for continuously disobeying and critiquing the ANC leadership on August 18<sup>th</sup> (Bauer, 2011), to cite only a few of the occasions when the media spotlight was trained on him.

Discourses of effectiveness around Malema’s statements and actions, communicated widely by the media, and interconnected with anxieties of racial polarization and disorder in South African society, have remained, and Malema has remained the folk devil in 2011.

On August 15<sup>th</sup> 2011 Ellis Mnyandu wrote an opinion article in the *Cape Times* titled – “London riots remind one of dangers of ignoring youth”, which read:

“Sooner or later, South Africa is going to confront the same reality that the Brits have just woken up to [...] a discontented youth, venting their frustration” (*Cape Times*, August 15 2010). The statement was made in light of the youth riots that took place in the UK in August 2011. A few weeks later, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2011, the ANCYL leader’s supporters held protests in front of Luthuli House, where Malema’s disciplinary hearing on charges

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<sup>32</sup> This information was based on surveys conducted among a random selection of 1 480 foreign visitors and 1 000 South Africans (FIFA.com, 2010d).



brought against him by the ANC was going to be held. The protests turned violent when “broken bricks were hurled at journalists and police officers and pictures of President Jacob Zuma and ANC flags were set alight” (*Cape Times*, August 31 2011). Halloran’s (1964) contributions to the understanding of media influences in society, rarely isolated from other societal mediating factors and influences are again useful. Although mass media is not an all-powerful technology and/ or institution that influences and transforms society *effectively*, it does indeed produce *effects*: “We should not completely disregard the workings of the medium itself, as if there were none” (Halloran, 1998). As Professor Nyamnjoh would probably stress, there is no need, nor is it productive, to *throw the baby out with the bath water*. In examining these recent events in 2011 and their effects on society, Berelson provides us with a useful and more nuanced view of the complexities and unevenness of the effects that the ANCYL leader might have on South Africans as a result of the media’s spotlight on him: “Some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions have some kinds of effects” (Berelson, 1948 cited in McQuail, 1969: pg. 172).

At the time I finished writing my thesis, discourses on the *effectiveness* of Malema’s actions and statements on South Africa’s disaffected majority of the population had once again risen to new heights. And the future, together with the exact nature of these effects was, as always, uncertain. Nonetheless, Malema and the discourses around him have become an important entry-point into better understanding current South Africa. Not only in this study but to the likes of Achille Mbembe (2011) and Fiona Forde (2011), the latter having very recently written a book tracing the rise of the ANCYL leader and how he has embodied and given voice to the contradictions in post-Apartheid South Africa.

At the beginning of this study I demonstrated how the introduction of communication technologies in societies has always raised hopes and anxieties throughout time and across different social contexts. ‘New’ media technologies are in Halloran’s terms (1964) often viewed as being able to influence and change individuals, groups and societies *effectively*. The Hash-tag Revolutions in the Middle East at the beginning of 2011 have contributed significantly to the amplification of the hopes around the role of Internet as a more democratic medium for serving the interests of common citizens unlike previous media technologies which have, for the most part, served the purposes of power-holding élites. However, it is important to keep in mind that media technologies acquire different

meanings and are used in different ways in different social contexts (Larkin, 2008; Miller & Slater, 2009; Miller, 2010; Nyamnjoh, 2010; Miller, 2011; Schannell, 2011).

Although some similarities between South Africa and, for example, Egypt could be pointed out, such as media regulations being proposed, a generalized discontent with the stark socio-economic and political inequalities in the country and with the government, these similarities are superficial when we go beyond the surface. In comparison to the nexus of mediating factors and influences in Egypt that allowed the #Jan25 Revolution to take place in the beginning of 2011, which I described in Chapter 1, the context in South Africa is different. Despite the Media Tribunal proposal in 2010, the government was perceived as lacking leadership rather than being controlling, drawing from the opinions and discussions among South Africans that I analysed; Stark inequality remains widespread and formal tertiary education is still to a large extent limited to élites. In addition, if “unity is forged through struggle”, as according to the view of professor Mamdani (2011), I would add that struggle, in most cases, needs to be directed at a specific common ‘enemy’ or goal. In the case of Egypt in 2011, unity among Egyptian citizens that cut across different ethnic and racial identifications, and different religious affiliations, was forged through the struggle against the country’s government. In South Africa, as in other African countries, State-citizen separation becomes blurred by family, friendship, and reciprocity ties. This is often dubbed as nepotism, clientalism, elitism, cronyism and other such -isms. Therefore, social media in the case of South Africa should probably acquire different meanings and become embedded in the lives of South Africans in different ways from the Egyptian case. Nonetheless, hopes and anxieties in relation to the Internet, especially social media have been revitalized worldwide, in light of the Hash-Tag revolutions.

In the present study I have explored the opinions and the discussions that the series of events in April 2010 gave rise to among South Africans. I have used three main sources as my fields of exploration: news reports and opinion articles from the South African daily newspaper, the *Cape Times*, interviews with South African students from the University of Cape Town (UCT), and from discussions taking place among South Africans online on Facebook, discussion groups in particular.

Drawing on James Halloran’s theory of *effectiveness* (1964) to explain popular understandings around the ability of media to influence people immediately, directly, and effectively, and Stanley Cohen’s concepts of moral panics and folk devils (1972), to explain

the revitalization of such understandings in times of crisis, provided this study with a useful framework within which to analyse the lived context in April 2010 in South Africa.

Some of the recurrent themes I identified in the course of many discussions in all of these fields demonstrated the resilient tendency of people to attribute to Julius Malema – the 2010 folk devil - through the media, the ability to *effectively* galvanize South Africans: into a Race War; into turning South Africa into another Zimbabwe or Zimbabwe II; into inciting or forcing white South Africans to leave the country – each of these recurrent moral panics in South African society.

However, at the same time, and in addition to these anxieties, opinions and discussions in all three fields showed a more complex and nuanced negotiation around other “mediating factors and influences” in South African society. These included: an awareness of the national media’s drive to sell news being one of the possible causes of media spotlight on events, figures, and topics deemed to be controversial in South Africa; the country’s current leadership, often described in opinions and discussions as weak and ineffectual in contrast to the leadership of charismatic former president Nelson Mandela; a disillusionment with the possibility of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ in face of the country’s stark socio-economic and political inequality, an inequality still visible along racial lines.

These themes led me to conclude that, in April 2010, incited to a large extent by the media’s spotlight on Julius Malema, South Africans were negotiating the cracks of South African society lived in the year 2010. This process included a papering over the cracks with discourses of *effectiveness* in line with framings of the media and, simultaneously, in the course of their discussions, ‘unpapering’ or revealing them by exploring the other mediating factors and influences at work in the context.

This complexity and heterogeneity I had already found in the opinion-pieces in the *Cape Times* as well as in the course of the conversations with UCT students and other South Africans in and around Cape Town. The Internet provided me access to a much larger number of South Africans and quantity of data. Although considered to be a less conventional field in the discipline of Social Anthropology, given the non-physicality and trans-locality of the field-site, and as a medium to which the majority of the population in South Africa (and other African countries) do not (yet) have access, it was a valuable complementary addition to this piece of research. Despite the common dichotomization of online *virtuality* vs offline *reality*, I was able to find a resonance of discourses across

‘traditional’ and ‘new’ media and across online and offline social spaces and interactions. By using the approach of crossing between online and offline fields and interactions, alongside a triangulation approach between the three sources, I aimed to devise a methodology that did not dichotomize online and offline social interaction, or separated new media from traditional media in the context of South Africa. This process therefore, accounted more adequately for the connectivity and fluidity of communication and social interaction in the South African context, relative to the series of events in April 2010 that I have explored.

The Internet acted primarily as a field-site to examine opinions and discussions taking place among South African internet-users which were intended to complement the opinions and discussions of my other sources. However, given the degree of resemblance in themes that emerged in online discussions, in comparison to those offline and in other media, I suggested a social uptake for the Internet, especially the social media, set in the context lived in April 2010 in South Africa: that of nation-negotiation. Nation-negotiation taking place in a more public and democratic space, compared to the space occupied by South African traditional media, able to cross over and between the ideological and structural legacies of racial segregation by providing a common space for social interaction among a diversity of South Africans. For many of whom access to the Internet is still limited but on the increase. Could the grassroots democracy favoured in the stateless space of the Internet (O’Neil, 2009) make it a more efficient way to achieve what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not able to? The possibility of reconciliation but through social interaction? These questions imply high expectations of the Internet as an effective space where nation-negotiation and reconciliation could take place and would require a more in-depth research of the nuances and complexities of such possibilities, as well as its limitations.

Finally, I hope to have demonstrated the increasing importance and usefulness ethnographic studies in, on, and using the Internet, to complement more conventional field-sites, methods, and areas of research in Social Anthropology. One cannot deny the importance of basing our research methodology on the research foundations of the giants, such as Malinowski, the founder of a version of the ethnographic method which has become an archetype of the discipline’s *manière de faire*. However, it is also important not to be restricted too narrowly to traditional boundaries but to complement them and at times, even interrogate them, in order for Social Anthropology to be and become a discipline that

can adequately address the local and global issues of a fast-paced, constantly changing and interconnected 21<sup>st</sup> century (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997).

Finishing this thesis with an inspiring statement might be falling into a cliché, but I found the following one too appropriate not to include:

‘The future has already started’

Thus, as social anthropologists interested in and concerned with the everyday lives of people, lived out in complex socio-economic and political contexts and informed by particular historical trajectories, we need to assert the value of our research in that future. The study of the rapidly emerging and changing media technologies that are increasingly becoming embedded in the everyday lives of people will not only benefit greatly from anthropological insights, but will, in turn, contribute to the depth and quality of anthropological research.

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